

THE LAST OF THE PURITANS

THE STORY OF
BENJAMIN GILBERT
AND HIS FRIENDS

FREDERIC P. LAURENCE

19.

"When the Great Recorder comes
To write against your name,
He writes not that you won or lost
But how you played the game"



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By **FREDERIC P. LADD**

AUTHOR OF "THE LADY OF SHENIPSIT"

TEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. S. MULFORD

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TO
MY WIFE

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FOREWORD

*When I consider Life and its few years—
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
A call to battle and the battle done,
Ere the last echo dies within our ears;
A rose, choked in the grass, an hour of fears;
A burst of music down the unlist'ning street;
The gusts that past a dark'ning shore do beat—
I wonder at the Idleness of Tears;
Ye old, old dead, and ye of yesternight,
Chieftains and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
By ev'ry cup of sorrow that you had,
Loose me from tears, and make me see aright,
How each hath back what once he stayed to weep—
Homer his sight, David his little lad.*

—Lizette Woodworth Reese.

THE LAST OF THE PURITANS

CHAPTER I

“Noo—oom—noo—m!” warned the weird wail of an automobile horn as the big machine spun by a tall young man walking wearily along a Connecticut country road in the sunshine of May. The young man’s firm mouth twitched, he passed his hand over his white forehead, and tried to smile. It was no use. Melancholy settled upon his fine, cleanly shaven features. A haunting look was in his brown eyes. In his heart was dumb acceptance of a bitter lot.

A month ago Giles Brewster had been in the full flush of health and vigor, with a future before him seemingly as sure and as fair as any man’s. One of the best liked, as he was one of the brightest of the younger professors at Brown, an associate in the Department of

English, his heart was in his work and his brain was clear as a bell. And music had been in his soul; for he was engaged to be married to one of the prettiest girls ever graduated from the women's college of the Rhode Island University.

That was four weeks ago! It seemed a lifetime. Now, Eternity was before him. His eyes could see to read no book. His brain knew too well the reality of suffering. Brewster had been caught in a railway wreck going from Providence to Boston to deliver a lecture which he never delivered. After the accident he was for some days in delirium. He came forth from this to face the truth: his doctors ordered him to the country for complete rest. The shock to his system had been severe. His eyes were seriously affected. He might recover, he might not.

The only near relative Brewster had in the world was his dead father's sister, a maiden aunt. It was to Aunt Susalla Brewster's home in the quaint little hamlet of Tolltown, among

the peaceful hills of rural Connecticut, that he was now going. As he journeyed along the dusty road he found it in his heart to thank his God that a measure of physical strength was still spared him. His athlete's frame betrayed little of the mental anguish the strong man bore. His eyes were beginning to pain him again. He drew forth some glasses from his inner coat pocket and placed them on his nose.

Brewster had already walked three miles from the railroad station at Mixville; it was only two more to Tolltown Street. Just now he was in a deep cut. An impulse seized him to clamber to the top of the steep bank on his left. Facing west, he looked upon successive ranges of hills to the horizon where lies the Connecticut valley; from this point on the Tolltown Turnpike, Hartford is twenty miles. Nearer nestle little towns whose white church steeples are easily discernible. Green fields merge into sloping woodland; hills tower afar. At the northwest, Wilton Mountain juts

toward the sky, majestic, deceiving as to distance.

"When I look far enough off," he said, "I can see as clearly as ever; how the river shines in the sun!" In a vale below and before him, a mile away, lay the lake-like expanse of Boulder River, which here shows no claim to its name; its broad bosom is unbroken and its current silent; it sweeps back into the country at the north with a mighty arm, though the stream comes from the east and flows due south beyond the great curve of its crescent. Brewster gazed long and intently at the beauty of river and vale and rising hills before he journeyed on, thinking, thinking.

Tolltown Turnpike runs into Tolltown Street opposite the Baptist Church, which is about midway the length of the broad village green. This extends half a mile; elms a century old and more tower over the central green. The double highway is arched by leafy maples and elms. The old-fashioned street is perfectly typical, restful and dignified.

Brewster stood at the green by the Baptist Church. He knew his aunt used to live at one end of the street or the other, but he could not remember whether it was up at the Methodist Church end or down at the south end, where the stately Congregational spire rises white and tapering from among the elms.

In the yard of the big square-topped lemon-colored house next the Tolltown Baptist Church, which has no steeple at all, a picturesque, robust individual perhaps forty years old was mowing the lawn. He toed in—decidedly. He chewed tobacco—violently. His hair stuck through his partially crownless hat, one side of which was much torn. He needed a shave.

Brewster leaned against the fence. The lawn mower stopped. "Hotter'n ——!" said the fellow, wiping his brow. He uttered it so expressively and naïvely that Brewster queried: "Sir?"

"Hot! —— it! Hotter'n —— mowin'!"

He had now abandoned the lawn mower and come up to the fence.

"What is your name?" asked Brewster.

"I'm Rob Wright who be you?" was the response in one breath.

"My name is Brewster; can you tell me where Miss Brewster lives?"

Rob Wright's brown, squirrel-like eyes suddenly bulged. "Be you, be you Prefesser Brewster?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes."

Rob Wright grew more agitated. "You're her nephew that was comin' to-day! Well, she lives down to *that* end—and she's dead—she died this mornin' sudden 'n' I was the first one knew about it—I——"

"What!" Brewster cut him off sharply. A burning anger rose within him at the shocking, preposterous statement of the fellow.

"What are you talking about? Who do you mean—is my aunt dead?" The last word came from him like a challenge. He could not believe; it was a mistake or a mockery.

Rob Wright stared.

"Show me the house!" commanded Brewster.

Rob Wright straddled the fence to climb it and half fell down, with a foot caught between pickets. Brewster set him upright and they started down the street.

"I was the first one knew it!" said Wright, finding his tongue. "I come to mow her lawn this mornin' and I went to git a drink o' water to the kitchen and I see her lying crost ways on the dinin'-room couch and I says, 'Good-mornin', Miss Brewster,' an' she never spoke!"

The professor increased his stride. Wright fairly ran to keep pace, and nearly fell over his own feet. "I was scairt, 'n' I run into Dr. Huntington's, that's next door, 'n' the doctor come in 'n' he couldn't bring her to, 'n' she was dead—'twuz heart trouble——"

"Is somebody at the house now?" Brewster asked; they had passed the Congregational Church and he saw the little white cottage down the street, and recognized it.

"There's been women there all day—Mis'

Henry Bishop, she lives where I was just mowin'—'n' I live there too—she's my aunt—she's here now." They were already at the beginning of the hedge that shut in the frontage of the yard from the street.

Rob Wright lagged. "Lend me five cents, will you?" he called out. A coin was flung back to him.

Brewster quickly stepped across the little veranda facing the street at the dining-room ell, and entered the house.

CHAPTER II

BREWSTER saw two women with their heads together reading a letter. Before them was his aunt's little old writing desk with half its drawers open and letters and papers strewn about. So engrossed were they that they were not at once aware of Brewster's footsteps. In a few seconds they felt his presence, and turned. "Oh!" said the older woman. She had shoulders like a man's and her neck was settled between them. She involuntarily covered her hands in her gingham apron.

"Mrs. Bishop?" inquired Brewster.

"Yes."

"I'm Mr. Brewster," he said; "I am told my aunt is dead!"

The younger woman, whose thin face crimsoned, hastily stuffed letters and papers back in the desk.

"This is Mrs. Starkweather, my daughter," remarked Mrs. Bishop. "We wuz tryin' to

straighten up things—we knew you wuz expected. Your aunt's death wuz awful sudden. I wuz one of her friends—I——”

“Yes,” said Brewster, and bowed.

There was an awkward pause.

“Guess I'll be goin’,” said the younger woman, and passed through the door.

Brewster spoke: “Mrs. Bishop, this is a terrible shock to me—I can hardly realize that my aunt is dead. Have any arrangements been made? Is, is—she here?” he asked.

“She never ought to lived alone so. Yes—the undertaker wuz got this forenoon—the—She's dressed in her black silk and laid out in the parlor. The casket's coming to-day. It wuz thought the funeral maybe you'd want to-morrow?”

Mrs. Bishop's voice rasped when she uttered an inquiry; it was metallic at best.

“I'll go in there,” he said; “alone, please,” he added, as Mrs. Bishop stepped heavily forward. She drew back, somewhat offended.

Giles Brewster was with his dead.

The face looked younger than he remembered to have seen it in life. It was lily fair as a young girl's might have been—sweet, peaceful and glorified; Heaven, after sixty-five years in the world. The fragile hands lay as lightly on her breast as garlands of flowers; the white hair was ethereal; the smooth forehead bore no trace of time or care now; only the mark of perfect rest.

The tears coursed unrestrainedly from Brewster's tired eyes. Longing, love, yearning unspeakable, filled his aching heart. She was the last of his own blood, and he had never known how lovely, how good she was. He realized with a shock the worth of a hundred tokens of affection that she had given in her silent way since the death of his father and mother in early young manhood. That he had dwelt away from her made no difference. She always remembered. He thought of the letter she wrote to Martha, bidding them welcome—if Martha, his wife-to-be, were only beside him

there now! So, yearning for the dead passed to longing for the living—his nearest and dearest.

Brewster had withdrawn from the little parlor; he stood at the dining-room door, which opened upon the veranda, and, with a sob in his throat, drank in breaths of the free air. How still was this still little village! An overpowering sense of it swept down upon him. A feeling of helplessness, a feeling of the Presence of God possessed him.

There was the sound of footsteps coming down the village street. A square-shouldered young man passed the hedge and came into view. He was a short figure; a shovel hat made his height seem less than it really was. He came up the walk to the cottage ell. His face was beardless, his tie white, and his clothes black. He extended his hand to Brewster. "I am the Reverend Matthew Lingane," he said; "I was your aunt's pastor. I take it you're her nephew that was coming——"

"Yes," answered Brewster, "come in."

The young clergyman sat down at Brewster's bidding, and they talked of funeral arrangements. In a half hour he rose to go.

Various other persons called during the long afternoon—kindly neighbors with good hearts and wet eyes.

When it had become nearly dark, and Brewster was alone, again some one rapped at the door of the dining-room ell. The professor was lighting the little lamp on the stand by the china closet. "Come in," he said. A young woman, bareheaded and dark haired, stepped just over the threshold.

"Dr. Huntington would like you to come in," she said; "our house is the next to this. We would be pleased if you would have supper with us. Your aunt was our dear friend. You must be very tired." She paused. Her manner of speech was unaffected and direct. Her voice was extremely clear, rather low pitched, and the gentlest Brewster had heard in all that day.

"Thank you," he answered; "it is kind of

you. I will. I *am* tired." He remembered that he had not tasted food since an early breakfast in Providence.

"Your name?" began Brewster absently, as he turned down the light and prepared to go with her.

"I am Ruth Huntington. Dr. Huntington is my father," she quickly said.

The girl was tall; she walked easily and rapidly a little ahead of Brewster in the dusk down the walk, and on the Huntington lawn. They entered a hallway at a side entrance, where a hanging lamp showed the way into the doctor's offices on the left, and into a large, well-appointed and brightly lighted dining-room at the right hand. The doctor sat before the open fireplace; the evening was cool, and the blaze grateful. He rose with the ease and quickness of manner characteristic of his daughter. He took Brewster's hand and looked into his face earnestly. Dr. Samuel Huntington was a fine figure of a man; spare, but well built—tall, with hair and mustache nearly snow white, and

a face of Puritan type, much bronzed by years of hard riding. His practice was distributed in a radius of many miles. His shoulders showed age, but his dark eyes held fire, and his voice rang true: "You must let us do whatever we can for you. Your aunt has been our neighbor and our friend for more than twenty-five years. She was a noble woman."

"Thank you," said Brewster, but could say no more.

A plump, pretty little woman dressed in black, and a boy of seven or eight, entered the room.

"My daughter, Mrs. Tremaine," said the doctor. Mrs. Tremaine expressed her pleasure. "My son, Percival," she said, presenting the boy, who had an interesting pug nose. They were soon seated at table, with Percival Tremaine directly opposite the professor. The boy had fat, red cheeks, tow hair, blue eyes, and looked like his mother. Mrs. Tremaine was a widow. Her married life had been spent in

Hartford, where her husband had recently died.

Ruth Huntington poured steaming chocolate. Brewster noticed what wonderful hair Ruth Huntington had; it neither waved nor curled; it was piled high in luxuriant masses on her shapely head and was perfectly black, with neither sheen nor gloss. This girl's eyes were, oddly enough, not black at all, but a very deep gray, lustrous and gentle, and large. She possessed an unusually sensitive mouth and a straight, slender nose. Ruth's manner was more reserved than that of her older sister, but she could not be over twenty-six or eight.

Brewster watched her closely, scarcely aware that he was doing so, while he talked with the others.

"I would like you to stay with us, if you choose—to sleep here, to-night," said Dr. Huntington to Brewster after supper. "You would feel less lonely, perhaps."

Brewster gratefully assented.

He went to the cottage and closed it.

"The room is ready, if Professor Brewster is tired," said Ruth, when he had returned, a little later.

"Just plain Mr. Brewster—please call me that—for you have made yourselves my friends, and there are no titles between friends," suggested Brewster, smiling. She looked back at him frankly.

"Mr. Brewster," she said, and gave him her hand, and bade him good-night.

The doctor showed Brewster to the great chamber with its wide windows, spotless curtains, fine old furniture and the odor of lavender and rose leaves pervading it. Between smooth sheets he sank to sleep.

CHAPTER III

MARTHA BEMIS, in her own little slant-ceilinged room on the third floor of the two-family house on Doyle Avenue, in which her father lived in Providence, sat with flushed cheeks and quickly beating heart reading a letter. To say that her cheeks were flushed tells not all the truth; they were crimson; always their coloring was rich; now it was riotous. Ordinarily her blue eyes were placid, with not too much of artful expression; now they seemed to look into a future filled with wonders.

It was night; the single gas jet by the window flickered in a gusty breeze. At the top of a hill was Martha's home, and from her window under the roof she saw the lights of the west side of the city as it lay below; for she had turned from her letter, and stood looking out into the night. Martha was tall; her head nearly touched the low ceiling; abundant tawny

hair, with streaks of gold, was coiled on the back of her head and hung low and covered her neck. She was a perfect specimen of sane, vigorous maidenhood, ready to blossom, to flower into a glorious free womanhood.

She sat on the edge of the bed, and again read her letter:

“MY DEAR MARTHA: It is a week since aunt’s funeral. I have delayed writing again until I should have decided what it is best to do. But you shall decide. I find myself in possession of aunt’s little place here in Toll-town Street. The cottage has seven rooms, four downstairs and three up, and would be a cozy home for two people. There is an acre of land for garden. Besides the place, there is a large wood lot on the hill, worth perhaps fifteen hundred dollars, if worked to good advantage. Aunt owned a few shares of Water Company stock. Now you know all my resources—the money I have saved, and the newly acquired. You know, too, that my eyes may trouble me for a long time.

“The question for you to decide is, shall we marry, and will you come here and take care

of me this summer? I feel that I have hardly the right to ask you, unless you would rather. Dear, it shall be as you say. If your judgment tells you it would be unwise to marry me now, I shall keep bachelor's hall here this summer at least.

"Remember me to your father and mother and Nell.

"As always,

"GILES BREWSTER."

The professor's letter was unevenly written, and evidenced how badly his eyes had troubled him.

The girl on the edge of the bed spoke to herself.

"Oh, I don't see how I could—I don't see. It would be terrible if his eyes shouldn't be all right again—and there would be children—of course there'd be children, and then, if he couldn't support them——"

She said no more, but still sat, dreaming her dream.

At last she rose and finished undressing. Deeply religious was Martha. Her faith had

never failed her. So, now, she gracefully fell upon her knees; her loosened hair streamed golden and tawny and shimmering across her flowing nightgown. She prayed fervently, and if one may judge, came to a satisfactory conclusion. For she was asleep five minutes later, and in measured breathing her fair bosom rose and fell.

Giles Brewster, as a professor at Brown, had lived his life with little thought of femininity until he began teaching a senior class at the women's college in connection with the University. And Martha Bemis became his pupil. From the first she attracted him.

She was born of plain, wholesome English parents, and seemed to him the very flower of her family. The father was a skilled worker in one of the jewelry factories. Martha's amiable mother had reared a numerous family, but only Martha and her younger sister Nellie were left at home.

There were no questionings in Brewster's

mind when once he had taken Martha in his arms and kissed her lips; the desire to call her his possessed him. The old, old story of propinquity and sex; a fresh, fair maiden and a man who was ready to love. And there was not a doubt that she loved him.

“MY DEAR GILES,” said her letter to Brewster, “I have been thinking all about what you wrote in your last. How nice it would be if we only could! It does seem hard that we can’t be married, and I would have had all my things ready by fall if it hadn’t been for your getting hurt. But I am going to make you wait, dear, because I am afraid it is best. You said the cottage would be a cozy home for *two* people. But you see it may be a long time before we can have much except the cottage to live on, but we hope it won’t be long a bit.

“Now I am going to surprise you. I have a place in the library at college to catalogue books all summer. I went to your friend, Professor Marsh, and he took me to the Librarian and told him I was a last year’s graduate, and he remembered me—of course he would—I spent hours and hours in the American Poetry

Collection! You said I was one of the poems. He was very kind, and I have the place, and I hope it will help you to think I am working, even if you can't be doing anything toward getting married just now, dear. But—we *shall* be married. No more for this time, because mamma called me several minutes ago to help fold sheets, as I used to make you do in the kitchen Monday nights when Nell had the parlor. She is courting hard, for a little girl, and I guess it will be a 'go.' He comes very regularly.

"Good-by. With love,

"MARTHA."

"P. S.—I am glad to know about that wood lot. Do you think it will be worth as much as you say?"

"I hope this writing is large enough. Are you going to do your own cooking, dear?"

"I guess I am," said the professor, as he tipped his chair back against the house where he sat on the little veranda of the dining-room ell, folded the letter, and put it in his pocket.

"She's right. Martha's a good practical girl."

Rob Wright came along, pushing a lawn

mower before him and toeing in. Brewster smiled, and greeted him.

"Say," said Rob Wright, sitting on the edge of the veranda, "be you goin' to get married?"

Brewster looked at him. "Who wants to know?"

"Well, my aunt, Mis' Henry Bishop, she was wonderin'. Folks 'spose you *be* goin' to."

Rob Wright gazed into Brewster's face with a toothless grin of good-fellowship.

"Do you ever go fishing?" asked Brewster.

"Ye-es," said Rob Wright, looking puzzled.

"And not catch anything?"

"Ye-es."

"Well," said Brewster, getting up to go into the house, "that's because you don't bait your hook right!"

"Say!"

The professor halted.

"Lend me five cents—I'll take it out when I mow your lawn next week."

Brewster solemnly placed a nickel in the eager hand.

"Much obliged!" said Rob Wright, and started up the street with his lawn mower.

Ruth Huntington and her sister, Mrs. Tremaine, went by and bowed pleasantly. Percival Tremaine tagged behind, and shied a stone at a hapless kitten on the green. Over across the street the three children of young Mrs. Starkweather, Mrs. Henry Bishop's daughter, were raising a din that rent the air. The girl of four slapped the face of the boy of three as they played on the piazza; he fell backward and over the creeping infant. The chorused shriek that followed was terrific; the infant's cry was impish.

The professor went into the house to pare potatoes for dinner.

CHAPTER IV

THE usual social gathering was in evidence when Brewster entered Randall's store that evening to buy groceries. White-whiskered, giant-framed, shrewd-featured John Randall himself leaned over the counter with his great hand on a bushel basket of potatoes. A dozen wooden rakes, and an assortment of hoes, shovels, scythes and whip lashes cast fantastic shadows in the uncertain illumination afforded by kerosene lamps. Clark Jones, the champion wood chopper of Tolltown, tall, gaunt and sinewy, stood straight against a high chest of spool silks and assorted braids. Ed Sperrow, who wore felt boots winter and summer, and carried a staff wheresoever he went, by day or by night, though he stood six feet and could have whipped two good men in spite of his sixty years, sat on a sugar barrel by the door, stroking his beard pensively. Eben Rider, professional mower of lawns and sawer of wood,

and in all respects the natural enemy and deadly rival of Rob Wright, had his whiskerless, gnarled face screwed into a grimace of many years' standing. Mr. Rider occupied a second sugar barrel. Orin Champlin, a thin-faced, cadaverous horse doctor, sat on a box beside Mr. Rider's barrel.

In the seat of honor, a wooden office chair that was braced and held together by a dozen iron rods and a score of bolts, sat Benjamin Gilbert, his feet on the stove and his right hand in a pail of seed beans. He was a big, deep-chested man with huge shoulders and powerful limbs. He was seventy, but age scarcely showed except in the fold of skin at his neck. He wore the old-fashioned kind of standing white collar that opens wide in front, and a black cravat of a pattern not often seen nowadays. Benjamin Gilbert's face was of large, strong type; a forehead almost massive, and a rugged set of features. His face was cleanly shaven except for a gray mustache.

There had been a momentary silence when Brewster entered the store.

"Well, there was nobody but Yankees here before, and there's nobody but Yankees here now," said Benjamin Gilbert, looking approvingly at Brewster.

Brewster was buying his groceries, and John Randall was waiting on him deliberately as he named articles wanted.

"And so, as I was sayin'," declared Benjamin Gilbert, "I will say on. It ain't the pleasantest thing in the world for us old Yankees that kinder love the place we was born in to see all the outlyin' farms and all the old homesteads of generations gone passin' into the hands of foreigners. Woodpiles at the front door and chicken coops in the front yard ain't specially pleasant to see, and when the European Sunday's observed by gettin' drunk, why, we wish they wouldn't!"

Benjamin Gilbert paused. Eben Rider lighted a pipe; Ed Sperrow prodded the floor with his long staff. Clark Jones bought a plug

of tobacco without further ado than putting a dime on the counter, and resumed his posture against the chest of assorted spool silks and braids as Benjamin Gilbert began speaking again:

“What I maintain is, that we Yankees air simply destroyin’ ourselves by lettin’ in the foreigners so fast. All our old communities air gettin’ the overflow from the cities. What I want to know is, what’s the end? What kind of a body politic air we goin’ to have in the State of Connecticut in thirty years more? What does town meetin’ mean to these shiploads of folks that air swarmin’ in? It’s all well enough to talk about their children bein’ Americans. Yes. What kind of Americans? Can ten per cent. of Yankees in a town educate ninety per cent. of foreigners? The percentage in the rural districts and factory towns won’t be ten per cent. Yankee in a few years more, at the present rate of immigration and emigration, and births and deaths. In some respects we air worse off than the cities air. Our schools

ain't so well equipped to handle foreigners. The country districts have been the safeguard of the nation, and the country districts have supplied the cities with the sturdiest stock and the best brains. Well, where air the cities goin' to draw from the next hundred years?"

There was a characteristic Yankee silence in John Randall's store. Presently, Benjamin Gilbert's great shoulders moved, and he rose deliberately from his chair. Brewster had listened with especial attention to the observations of this old-fashioned Yankee—type of a bygone day. Benjamin Gilbert passed out of the store, and Brewster followed, his arms laden with groceries. The older man waited, in neighborly fashion, and walked down the street with him. "Mr. Brewster," he said, as they crossed to the westerly side, "I'd like to have you come down and call on me; it's the house next to the grist mill, at the foot of the hill out of the street. I live there alone, and have ever since my wife and daughter died. I do my own cookin' and keep house alone same's

you do. I knew your father well; we was together at Antietam. He was a gentleman and a scholar and a fighter. He was worth knowin', and I guess you air." After this frank avowal Benjamin Gilbert at once said good-night and went on down the street, as Brewster turned into his yard and deposited groceries at his kitchen door, and then went around through the dining-room to unlock it and take them in. His aunt's little cottage had been so decorously kept for a quarter of a century that the professor would have deemed it unseemly to take in groceries at any front entrance.

CHAPTER V

THE professor arose early next morning and worked in his garden, planting a row each of peas, string beans and bush limas. After a breakfast of cocoa and crackers he lay on the couch in the dining-room and went fast asleep. At ten o'clock, being awakened by the screaming of the Starkweather children across the street, he decided to make a forenoon call upon Benjamin Gilbert, down by the grist mill.

Tolltown Street runs north and south along a narrow plateau between two ranges of hills. At the south end it descends into a vale. Looking due south from the end of the broad front piazza of Benjamin Gilbert's white story-and-a-half house, South Tolltown Depot is nearly three miles straight away down the vale. In front, on the east, rises a towering wooded hill, at the base of which flows the small stream that turns the grist mill water wheel.

The north end of Benjamin Gilbert's piazza

was screened from Brewster's view as he approached by a woodbine; a thick, intermingled growth of cinnamon vine and honeysuckle on the front met it at the corner, and closed in a space.

The silvery notes of a cornet suddenly fell upon the still, clear air; Brewster turned up the short walk from the road and came to the piazza. He had expected to see Benjamin Gilbert; instead Ruth Huntington, bare-headed, sat there on a low green bench, her softly rounded arms poised, cornet at her lips, playing "Annie Laurie." She stopped, laid the cornet in her lap, and pulled down her white muslin dress sleeves; they had crept above her elbows.

"Good-morning," said Brewster.

"Good-morning."

"I heard music."

She smiled, rather gravely, and crossed her feet at the edge of her white dress.

"I didn't know you played—especially a cornet."

She smiled, less gravely. "I don't—especially a cornet."

There wasn't the slightest malice meant in the turn of her reply, however.

Brewster caught the good comradeship of her tone and rejoined: "Won't you finish 'Annie Laurie'?"

"It's old."

"And sweet."

"I think so," she said, raised the cornet to her lips, and played it through without a quaver.

Her self-possession inspired enthusiasm in the professor. "That's good—I like that!"

Benjamin Gilbert came out the front door with a violin. A yellow and white kitten was perched on his shoulder.

"Hello! Glad to see you, sir; if I'd known you were here I'd brought a chair!" Brewster stood, leaning against a veranda post. Benjamin Gilbert reached into the hall and drew forth a big rocker. The kitten left his shoulder and scampered away, as he shook hands

heartily with Brewster. He sat on the bench beside Ruth. Brewster took the rocker.

"I wasn't kind to you—you might have sat on the bench while you were waiting!" said Ruth consciously.

"But you played to me!—now you'll both play—won't you? I didn't mean to interrupt a musical morning."

"We have 'em, Ruth and I—she's young and playin' better every day, and I'm old and playin' worse, so it balances even. Ruth, what shall we give him?"

She softly blew the first few notes of "Old Kentucky Home." Forthwith they played it. The professor listened, pleased. Gilbert was no mean violinist. The combination of violin and cornet was good.

"We don't play anything fancy," said Benjamin Gilbert, "because we can't. We play those old things because we like 'em."

"So do I."

They played "The Last Rose of Summer."

Then they rested, and Benjamin Gilbert explained to Brewster exactly how he'd trained the vines to grow on the piazza. "The south end I leave free because it's hot there, shade or no shade, and I like to look off to South Toll-town Depot."

"It's a pleasant view down the vale," Brewster said.

"We'll play 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,'" said Benjamin Gilbert, placing violin in position. The cornet notes were perfectly clear, but sufficiently subdued; there was no brassy sound or blare.

Ruth rose. "I must go."

"Not on my account?" asked Brewster.

"No," she said simply.

There was an absence of superlative about this girl.

"Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert, "will you take my mixture bottle up to your father? I'm out. If he'll fill it, I'll be up for it this afternoon or to-night."

"Yes."

He went in. She wrapped the cornet in a green baize cloth.

"See here," remarked the professor, "I've been your neighbor two weeks—I almost feel as though I might have been born and brought up in Tolltown Street—and I haven't heard a note from that cornet of yours till now—don't you play at home?—I like it, the way you play it."

"I was afraid perhaps you wouldn't like it—our houses are so close; anyway, I don't have much time, when I'm home; down here I relax."

"Did you think that cornet would bother me?"

"I thought it might." She spoke seriously.

Brewster answered equally seriously: "Well, it wouldn't."

Benjamin Gilbert came out and handed a four-ounce bottle to Ruth.

Brewster rose. "Thank you for your music," he said.

"You are welcome," she answered, and said

good-by to both men. The yellow and white kitten appeared, and ran at her heels down the walk, diving madly at the edge of her dress.

"I'd like to hear you two play again," said Brewster, turning to the older man, who was on the green bench, and was filling a comfortable corn-cob pipe. He was such a big man that the pipe appeared like a very small toy. "Will you have a cigar?" he asked Brewster.

"I don't smoke much—thank you; but I believe I'll join you this time." The professor lighted it from the big man's proffered match. Benjamin Gilbert lighted his pipe and took a few satisfying puffs.

"We play some, but not in general for audiences; but any time you want to come down here we sha'n't stop playin', and you will be welcome. However Ruth feels about it is proper, and if she objected to playin' because you was here she would object right off; she didn't object."

"Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert after a short pause, "is pretty close to me. For two years

she and my Susie went away to Mount Holyoke to school together; then my wife died, and Ruth's mother died the same winter; pneumonia—it was one of your green, open winters; Ruth and Susie both came home. In the spring Susie went down with quick consumption; she set on this piazza in the sun for the last time five years ago the tenth of June; that'll be a week from this comin' Sunday. She'd 'a' been twenty the first day of that July; she was born the same year, same month, as Ruth Huntington."

Benjamin Gilbert relighted his pipe.

"What has Ruth Huntington done in the five years—been here in Tolltown all the time?"

"Done? She's done good! She always does good. She's just like her father. Her mother was good, too, and a capable woman; but Ruth's got her father's special kind of brains. She's run her father's house and kept me from goin' to pieces besides. She knew I was lonesome without my tellin' it."

Brewster had forgotten to puff, and his cigar was out. He relighted it.

"You've got the best neighbors in Tolltown Street; your Aunt Susalla had 'em, and now you've got 'em."

"Yes," said Brewster; "they're all kindness and goodness—it hasn't taken me long to find out that."

The big man looked him squarely in the eye. "Brewster," he said, "it's such folks as the Huntingtons that give a man confidence in human nature, an' belief in Almighty God."

There was silence between the two men. Brewster looked at the great hill before them. In spite of him a tear ran down his cheek. The big man rose and put his hand on Brewster's shoulder. "My boy," he said, "you're goin' to be one of us." Benjamin Gilbert's voice was vibrant with feeling.

"I want to," said Brewster.

"You *air*," said the big man; "'round here was where your folks was born an' raised. You've come back here in time o' trouble to

learn the philosophy of Life. *I've* ben here learnin' it ever since I was born, except when I went away to war in sixty-one. I've farmed it, an' I've run my grist mill these forty years since. Just recently I've sold th' old mill on account of asthma—kinder wheezed me up—an' I've felt lonesome 'thout it—but I've got my place, an' I've got th' sunshine, an' I've got friends, an' I've got good memories, an' I've got some philosophy that don't ever go back on me, an' won't go back on any man."

Brewster's tired eyes searched the other man's face. "Philosophy?" he asked, in an undertone.

"Th' philosophy is this," said Benjamin Gilbert. "There ain't a day of our life that don't bring something good, an' there ain't any hard day nor any big trouble that couldn't a' ben harder an' bigger—now I ain't preachin', but, Brewster, I want t' tell you that here, and from now on, is where your life is goin' t' unfold, an' that th' time'll come when you'll say about that accident of yours that's so terrible to you just

now, 'Brewster, it sent you to Tolltown, an' you was more blessed than you knew!' Now I ain't goin' t' keep on talkin' in this strain, but I could just see you needed a little re-enforcin', and it's good for a feller t' know that friendly troops air close by. Let's go down an' see my garden!"

Brewster looked up into the big, kind face.

"You're great!" he said, and smiled.

"Tut," said Benjamin Gilbert; "come on down t' th' garden!"

A half hour later, when Brewster spoke of going home, Benjamin Gilbert said him nay. "There's a leg of lamb bakin' in the oven, and you'll have dinner with me," he insisted. Brewster stayed. The meat was done to a turn, and a generous rice pudding which Ruth Huntington had prepared for the oven was so good that the two men finished it.

Then they smoked and talked, sitting on the broad piazza, with the great hill in front of them, its inscrutable shadows changing and shifting as the afternoon wore on.

"When my roses bloom," said Benjamin Gilbert, as at last Brewster rose to go, "you'll have dinner with me again; I cook meat with rose leaves in th' dish, an' it makes it a lee-tle extra."

"That ought to be fit for a king!" said Brewster.

"'Tis," said the big man, giving Brewster his hand for good-by; "it's reg'lar royal rations!"

That night Brewster received an affectionate letter from Martha Bemis, inquiring most anxiously about his eyes. He read it with considerable difficulty. If she had only been there to put her arms about his neck and tell him she loved him! He remembered how her husky-sweet voice used to sound.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day, Sunday, it rained. Brewster did not feel in the mood for church, and busied himself changing the position of some of the furniture within the cottage to suit his fancy. Late in the afternoon the weather cleared beautifully, and he went to walk in the early evening. A cooling breeze, and the fresh smell of green foliage made the air fine. At dusk he returned. Dr. Huntington and Mrs. Tremaine were sitting on their front porch, and he was invited to come up.

The Huntington house faces east. On both the northeast and southeast corners large bay windows, upstairs and down, had been built on. The doctor's offices occupied the north corner; the large family parlor the south side; the broad central space between is given to a porch of dimensions that would dwarf a room of ordinary size. The front door is here, entrance to the doctor's office being had on the

north side, next the driveway leading to the barn. Maples line the street in front of the Huntington house at the sidewalk; but closer stand stately elms, rising and arching to touch the roof peaks above the upper story. The trunk of one of these runs so close to the house that, leaning from the wide south window of the library, which is upstairs over the parlor, one might encircle it with an arm. With the moss-colored paint of the house the tree trunks blend. Through the tracery of trees the light of the moon fell upon the porch in weird outlines and bars of silver. The shadow of a bough slightly moving in the breeze played odd trickery upon Dr. Huntington's face as he sat there and talked with Brewster.

At nine o'clock Ruth Huntington came home from church, and with her came Mr. Charles Edwards, cashier of the Tolltown Savings Bank, a full-faced, confident young man of thirty-three or four, a figure of no little importance in his community, as Brewster could not but discover by his conversation during the

next half hour. Ruth Huntington sat silently in her wicker rocker in a shadowy corner until Brewster arose to go, when she came forward and bade him good-night. Mr. Edwards remained longer.

Brewster found himself wondering, before he went to sleep that night, if Edwards were honoring the girl with his attentions.

When Brewster awoke next morning it was cold and rainy again, and so continued most of the week. An interesting event occurred in the birth of four kittens to his Aunt Susalla's black and white cat, Jemima. Two were maltese and two looked like Jemima. The professor thought of destroying some of them, but his heart was too tender. Perhaps he could give away a pair later. He would keep at least a pair for himself. Jemima had been shy of him, and her kittens were born in the barn, but the professor brought them in and put all the family in a big basket in the back entry of the kitchen, leaving the kitchen door open that they might enjoy the warmth.

Twice that week Brewster heard the clear notes of Ruth Huntington's cornet. Once he heard the tenor voice of Charles Edwards raised in song, to piano accompaniment, at the Huntingtons'.

On Saturday, at last, the sun came forth splendidly. Brewster went into his garden that morning to see the wonders of the seeds he had planted. He walked along and examined everything: corn, peas, tiny red beet tops, a host of carrot shoots, which had come through since the rain, split and gaping young bush limas just through the soil at very irregular intervals, and, looking rather ridiculous, string beans, also irregular, but in gracious profusion. "I must have dropped about three beans to the inch," remarked the professor, stooping down to look carefully at these.

He became conscious of a presence behind him, and turned.

"I come down the street, and I see you wuz out here," said Mrs. Henry Bishop—her voice sounded like the stridence of a distant car wheel

slowly rounding a curve—"and I thought mebbe you'd feel sociable out here, it's so pleasant!"

"It's a fine morning," he answered.

"Garden doin' well?"

"Fairly well, I judge."

"Good soil here," she said, letting her short neck sink between her heavy shoulders. She produced a handkerchief and blew her nose in a meditative, semi-religious fashion. The nose was an inch shorter than it should have been for beauty.

"Good soil is a good thing," said Brewster.

"I heard you wuz plantin' quite a garden—mebbe you'd have peas 'n' corn to dispose of bime by. I ain't got no good garden spot—it's all orchard—though I s'pose if you're goin' to get married your family'll eat more?" said Mrs. Bishop.

Brewster made no answer.

"Your aunt had a lovely garden here some years—your aunt and I wuz great friends."

"Yes?" said Brewster.

They turned and walked toward the house.

"I don't suppose you've done much yet about straightenin' her things out?" suggested Mrs. Bishop.

"*Letters*—and things?" asked Brewster sententially.

"Oh, dresses and linens, and papers and—letters!" said Mrs. Bishop, explosively uttering the word in spite of herself.

"Mrs. Bishop, if I should decide to have you read the rest of my aunt's letters—I'll let you know."

She stared at him until her eyes reddened.

"Good-morning," he said coolly; "I know you'll excuse me, for I have something on the stove."

"Certainly," said the lady, in rather a high key.

CHAPTER VII

BENJAMIN GILBERT'S roses had bloomed, and Giles Brewster was seated at the big man's hospitable board on the occasion of the rose-leaf dinner. "I use white rose leaves altogether," said Benjamin Gilbert, as he carved, "and lay 'em all over the meat and in the dish, too—brown gravy?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Ruth Huntington fixed that gravy; to tell the truth, this is more her dinner than 'tis mine—she knew I was goin' to have company to dinner, and who it was goin' to be, and she was here most all the forenoon before you came gettin' things ready. I tried to have her stay, but she said she couldn't this time."

"I'm sorry she didn't stay."

"She's comin' down after dinner with her cornet. I asked her, and she said she'd do that."

"I'm glad of it," said the professor. He

noted a vase of red roses on the table, and guessed at the touch of a woman's hand.

"Your aunt Susalla thought the world of Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert, passing the creamy pale yellow butter to Brewster.

"I'd like to ask you something, Mr. Gilbert; about how close friends were my aunt and Mrs. Henry Bishop? Were they intimate?"

Benjamin Gilbert looked at Brewster. "Well—your aunt was a woman that was kind to everybody, but as for her bein' what you'd call intimate with Mis' Henry Bishop, I should say she most decidedly was not. She was too different a sort and description of woman. I am goin' to say this: that if Mis' Henry Bishop and I, both of us, follow the example your aunt set in never peddlin' gossip, creatin' scandal or tryin' to pry into other folks' business, we will both of us do well; and bearin' that example in mind, and wishin' to say no hard things about any woman, I will pass you some just about as fine a variety of peas as I ever raised for an extra early smooth; I tried cookin' rose leaves

with 'em once, but it didn't work so well as it does with the meat."

Benjamin Gilbert's peas were as luscious as any Brewster had ever put in his mouth. The whole dinner was perfect, and the professor said so.

"Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert.

They sat at table after the bread custard pudding, and Brewster had a cigar. Benjamin Gilbert smoked his pipe.

"Mr. Gilbert, I take it that in a small community like this, where everybody knows and is supposed to have a friendly, neighborly interest in everybody else, it's fair that your neighbors should know when you're born, and get married, and die. I've come into this town, where my father was born and grew up, and where the last of my blood has just passed away; I've come under circumstances that are somewhat unusual; everybody knows me already, and if they want to know *about* me, I'll admit the privilege is theirs. There's bound to be more or less irresponsible gossip about any

newcomer in a small town; there's one impression concerning me that may be wrong; do you know if it is generally understood that I am going to be married this summer?"

"There have been," said Benjamin Gilbert, after puffing on his pipe, "as near as I can recollect and judge at this minute, about one hundred and seventy-five stories about your gettin' married. Some of 'em told you *was* married. I heard you was in a railroad wreck, dyin', and your girl was sent for and you was united by a dyin' minister then and there, to save the girl's good name, after which you got well and deserted her. After hearin' that one, I thought 'twas doubtful if you ever had a girl."

Benjamin Gilbert spoke perfectly seriously.

The professor looked at him with something approaching awe upon his countenance.

"I should judge it was time my real friends in town knew facts; I count you as one of these. I have been engaged to be married for more than a year. I do not now expect to marry for

some time to come. In all probability I shall not marry until after I leave Tolltown. That is all there is to be said in regard to my engagement; if you will state the facts to the Huntingtons and to any others you think have a right to know, I will thank you."

"I see your view of the case and judge it to be correct. I'll say a word where and when necessary. Lord! some folks have *got* to have something to gossip about! The brainless ones and the mean ones get to lyin' just as easy as runnin' up a grain bill!"

"Peculiar about some people, isn't it?" said Brewster; "how they'd rather talk than be somebody."

"Passin' peculiar, well I should say yes. You just about struck it. But I generally forgive folks. Especially women. There used to be an old feller in this town that had a wife that always knew a whole lot of things that wa'n't so. Also she objected t' anybody knowin' anything unless they knew it her way. This old feller, he used t' kinder get out o'

patience. He said t' me one time, 'Durn it all, Benjamin, I don't want a woman t' know all I know, but I want her t' be willin' that I should know it.' 'Well,' I told him, 'if I was you I wouldn't mention it then.' It's a good, safe rule not t' introduce anything into th' conversation that you ain't anxious to argue about."

"Good logic," said the professor.

"An' dreadful safe," said Benjamin Gilbert.

The two men were still at table when Ruth Huntington arrived. She wore a muslin dress over pale blue and looked cool and refreshing, despite the heat of the afternoon. Brewster considered offering her a red rose from the vase to put in her black hair, but finally decided not to.

They went to the vine-enclosed end of the piazza, Benjamin Gilbert bringing his violin and Ruth her cornet.

For a time the heat was oppressive. By four o'clock, however, a strong breeze swept down from the hills and they played for Brewster.

It was nearly five when Ruth laid aside her cornet and arose.

"Thank you for that pudding you made for dinner, and the music, and the whole afternoon!" said Brewster; "I've enjoyed everything." She smiled seriously, as was her wont. "I'm glad," she said, and passed in at the front door.

"Don't you go to doin' them dishes, Ruth," called Benjamin Gilbert after her; "I've got all night comin' an' nothin' else to do!"

But Ruth failed to reappear until Benjamin Gilbert went in and told her Brewster was going.

She came to the front piazza, evidently quite unconscious of how well a pretty white apron, or, for that matter, the color in her cheeks, became her; plainly she was not yet ready to leave Benjamin Gilbert's household, so the professor said good-by instead of asking to walk home with her as he had half intended.

Benjamin Gilbert stated to Ruth the exact situation in regard to Brewster's engagement

late that afternoon. She listened attentively, remarked there'd been a lot of idle gossip about it, and presently went home.

Ruth Huntington was in no wise a person to be elated at the possession of "news." It is even likely that, so far as the fact of Brewster's engagement was concerned, she would have been content for an indefinite length of time into the future to regard it as wholly uncertain, if not improbable.

It did not seem very real to her now. Being imaginative, she merely wondered what kind of a girl he would choose to love and to marry.

CHAPTER VIII

FOURTH OF JULY celebrants in Tolltown were accustomed to bestow no little attention upon Robert Wright, the nephew of Mrs. Henry Bishop.

On Fourth of July morning Mr. Wright's wheel-barrow, lawn-mower and saw-horse were to be seen securely fastened to the chimney on top of the post-office. Mr. Wright was a not uninterested spectator of the phenomenon. The professor heard him swear distinctly as he passed by him and walked slowly down the street from the post-office with a letter in his hand from Martha Bemis.

"DEAR GILES," she wrote, "I received your last letter, and hasten to reply. Professor Marsh has gone away for the summer, so I couldn't ask him about those books. But, oh! My sister Jennie has the cunningest, darlingest babies I ever saw—*twins*. Giles! Isn't that splendid! Jennie is the one that lives on Pallas Street now, that was married in Boston after we were engaged. Oh, you just ought to see those twins! I held them both—I wonder



"Mr. Wright was a not uninterested
spectator of the phenomenon"



if you'd laughed to have seen me holding them both at once, dear. I thought I did it really well. They look just alike, only one is not quite so deep a shade of *pink* as the other. Oh, but they are so pink, and so *darling*. Jennie is just as happy as she can be, and I should think she would be. You ought to hear them cry! One is a boy, and he cries loudest. It is the funniest ever, first one, and then the other, and then both.

"Dear, I was disappointed in your last letter because I know well enough the way it was written your eyes are not getting into working condition a bit well. What *do* you think of fall? Do you think perhaps you could *begin* to do some work gradually? I am busy in the library, and shall be, at least every day but Sundays up to September 15th. Keep courage, and remember I am working if you cannot. Now, don't put me off about your eyes, but tell me *just* how they are. What you wrote about your beans coming up crooked in the garden was funny. Write soon.

"Yours, with love, MARTHA."

"P. S.—I am going out to post this letter and over to Jennie's to see the twins. I haven't seen them since last night—bless their hearts!"

Brewster's heart was unspeakably saddened by Martha's letter. Her confidence in him once had been so absolute; she had been so proud of him! Now?

He could not bear to go into his cottage; he knew that meant to brood. He kept on by and went down to Benjamin Gilbert's. The big man was killing flies with a flat wire "killer," as he sat comfortably in his big chair and slapped them to the floor of the piazza whenever they lighted on his knees or on the table at his right.

"I'm dreadful busy an' glad t' see you," he said, as Brewster entered at the gate. "I was hopin' you'd come down to-day, and wonderin' if you wouldn't. Just watch me feed these flies to my bumblebee friend!"

Brewster observed. Surely enough, a big bumblebee pounced upon an unconscious fly, as Benjamin Gilbert wielded the "killer" with a dexterous stroke and brought a fly to the piazza floor.

"That's a new one to me!" said Brewster.

"Th' bumblebee comes around reg'lar," said the big man; "he seems to expect me to do his foragin' for him, and I kinder like to. He buzzes real friendly, an' likes the flowers, same's I do. An' he likes th' flies better!"

The bumblebee soon appeared to have been satisfactorily fed, and circled about Benjamin Gilbert's head, buzzing in truly friendly fashion before he finally flew away.

"He'll be back to-morrow."

Brewster looked up and smiled faintly. He had taken a seat on the piazza step, where he sat in dejected fashion, his hands about a stalwart knee.

"Brewster, I guess you kinder needed t' come down an' see me—you look most too troubled—what is it?" There was infinite sympathy and friendliness in the tone.

Brewster sat up straight and looked the other man in the face. He drew Martha's letter from his pocket. "Just read that! I'm no good!—I've got to tell somebody! I can't give that girl a square deal!"

Benjamin Gilbert read the letter carefully. "Well," he said, folding it and handing it back, "Sister Jennie, she's got a square deal." Brewster's tense features relaxed, and he smiled.

"The trouble with young folks is that they're apt to be impatient. That's one of the penalties of bein' young. But there's lots of time ahead of you an' Marthy."

Brewster seized upon the word. "Time!—That's the trouble—there's too much time!"

"My boy, Time is the greatest healer, an' the surest cure of anything in this world. There ain't any evil, nor any disappointment, nor any bad situation that Time can't fix. An' it fixes it so much better'n you could that it's just plumb ridiculous to fret. Now I know it's natural for you and that girl to be anxious—but, good Lord, the day'll come that you'll be glad you had this preliminary delay to your plans, just as sure as your name is Brewster! You ain't *ready* t' get married——"

"But the girl's ready!" broke in the professor; "look at the injustice to her!"

“Brewster, don’t you worry about that. I’ve seen some girls durin’ my life, an’ there’s always one rule you can go by. A girl that’s staunch enough to wait for a feller through time o’ trouble is growin’ sweeter an’ better every day. She just can’t help it, if she’s that kind. An’ if she gets tired of waitin’, why she ain’t the kind of a girl for that feller. Th’ whole of married life is just waitin’ an’ hopin’ an’ expectin’, an’ takin’ disappointments, an’ risin’ up in th’ mornin’ with a good bright look as though there wasn’t a thing the matter, an’ livin’ the days fair an’ sweet. An’ that’s what your Marthy’s learnin’ t’ do. She’s all right! Look at the joy she’s a-takin’ in them twins right now! Pretty near as much as you’d take if they was yours and hers. An’ *you* don’t have t’ hear ’em holler, Brewster! You can stand not hearin’ ’em holler, can’t you, Brewster?”

The professor smiled.

“Why, durn it, think what a commotion an’ pandemonium there’d be up to your cottage with twins hollerin’, and Mis’ Starkweather’s

three a-yellin' across th' street besides!" Benjamin Gilbert's voice fairly rumbled in whole-souled sympathy.

"An' it's Fourth o' July t'day, too. As matters *air*, you're goin' t' stay down here with me all day, an' be away from the fire-crackers an' din, an' you ain't got twins on your mind, an' you ain't got anything whatsoever on your mind but what you can handle a durn sight better'n you might be able to handle twins. It's real peaceful down here." The big man looked calmly across at the high hill. Fleecy clouds were sailing in the far blue sky. Brewster's gaze followed, and then rested intently on Benjamin Gilbert's face.

"That sky looks like Eternity," said Brewster.

The old man moved his great body easily, and the big chair creaked. He settled back, and looked at the professor, meantime picking up his comfortable pipe from the table and slowly lighting it. "Well," he said, "it is Eternity."

"Are we sure of it? Do we *know*?"

"I've been there—I know."

Brewster's gaze again questioned.

"Dreams—nights," said Benjamin Gilbert; "I've seen folks I knew—seen 'em plain—ben right with 'em."

The two were silent.

"Brewster," said the big man after a little, "Brewster, I met my Susie when I went to sleep the òther night an' passed over there for the time bein'." He pointed slowly at the deep sky above the hill. "An' I heard her *say*, as plain as I saw her face, 'Papa, *it's all right!*'"

Brewster's own eyes glistened with a sudden tear. He looked into the strong face above him.

"Son," said the old man, "you and I air goin' t' be dreadful good friends—I like folks with understandin's an' feelin's."

Benjamin Gilbert smoked in silence.

"You've taught me something," said the younger man finally; "I guess you've made me ashamed of myself for fretting."

"Everything, everything that ain't right now is *goin' t' be*. Don't forget that th' way t' handle sorrow is t' set th' clock ahead—an' now s'pose we step into th' kitchen. You can begin shellin' th' peas whilst I start up th' fire."

After dinner there was the long, drowsy afternoon. At six the men prepared their simple supper. They were at table when a light tap on the door was followed by the entrance of Ruth Huntington. She made a charming picture, dressed in white, bare-headed, and with a soft, clear color in her cheeks.

"I thought you two would be here," she said brightly; "I've got some ice cream for you—we had a lot to-day, and I wanted you to have some—I walked fast, and it's still hard."

"Say, Ruth, that's just as good as can be—I'm real glad—what do you say, Brewster?"

"Fine!" he answered.

Ruth emptied the cream into a shallow dish and served it on old-fashioned china.

"Simple pleasures," said Benjamin Gilbert,

"air th' spice of life. When I was a boy I most went crazy when ice cream was mentioned. Then after a while I got so I could eat it 'thout bein' real excited. Now I ain't excited at all, and I vow I like it better'n ever!"

Ruth and Brewster smiled, and the big man beamed as he finished his last spoonful. Ruth insisted on helping them clear away the table, and getting an apron washed the few dishes in her deft, dainty fashion.

They went out upon the piazza. It was glorious as the sun went down. The cool breeze of evening swept through the vale, and one by one stars began to appear, until suddenly there were myriads in the dusky sky above.

At ten Ruth and Brewster took their leave, to walk home together.

Brewster's eyes discerned a single white rose on a late blooming bush as they were come to the end of the door-yard fence. He reached through and plucked it and gave it to Ruth.

"For you," he said.

She placed it in her hair. There in the night he saw the light of her eye. It seemed to him that he had never seen anything more clearly in his life.

There are little moments deep with meaning in the lives of us all. Years afterward Brewster remembered Ruth and the white rose.

CHAPTER IX

DOG days came early that year. Brewster's cottage was low and built close to the ground. With the continuous damp weather, clothing and articles of every sort in closets, drawers and chests began to gather moisture. Brewster asked Ruth Huntington to come in and help him put matters to rights.

"I would rather have you touch my aunt's things than anybody else in Tolltown—she knew you, and you knew her," said Brewster; "will you do it for me, and for her?"

"Gladly," said Ruth Huntington.

There was plenty to be done; clothing to be aired, laid away; miscellaneous belongings to be sorted, packed and preserved from injury, and moths to be routed. Also, contemplation once sweet to the soul of Mrs. Henry Bishop, there were letters to be looked over. These were filed away or destroyed as fast as Ruth stated their nature and contents.

"I had no idea what I was asking of you—I didn't know there was anything like this amount of work to be done," said Brewster at the end of the second day; "I can't thank you enough."

"I think we've got on very well. You've let me do this and I'm glad. I am coming again to-morrow after breakfast."

"There's only the north chamber left for to-day," she said when she appeared at nine the next morning. The professor was slicing a tomato to be put on ice for dinner.

"Will you let me slice those?"

"Thank you."

She poured hot water on two fine tomatoes and deftly removed the skins. The professor sat absently nursing a finger he had cut just before she came in. If she noticed the cut finger, she forbore to speak of it.

"What I ought to do is to tell you that tomatoes are much better if iced only a half

hour before serving," she said, with her back to him.

"Oh, I didn't know about that. Benjamin Gilbert knows more about housekeeping than I'll ever learn, I'm afraid."

She made no answer. The professor's growing kittens and Jemima were crying for milk, and the professor fed them in a tin dish of broad circumference, which allowed all to partake at once.

"Shall I come upstairs now?" he asked, as she made ready to go; "or would I be in the way?"

"Come; it's mostly trinkets and keepsakes in those upper bureau drawers, I know, because she told me once that they were filled with things she had when she was a girl."

They passed into the little front hall and up the steep stairs to the north front room.

Brewster occupied an armless rocker and held a lapboard on his knees; Ruth Huntington emptied the contents of the top bureau drawer upon this, and then sat facing him in a

straight-backed wooden chair of many a year ago.

She untied a little package. "Do you know that you've never called me anything?" she said presently.

"Called you anything?"

"Called me my name—Ruth—as every one does. You haven't called me anything at all."

Brewster smiled. "Well, I suppose I haven't. I didn't exactly want to say Miss Huntington or Miss Ruth every time, so I thought 'Ruth' and made direct remarks."

"You can say Ruth and I'll know who you mean just the same." She smiled; there were two red spots on her cheeks.

Brewster spoke—one of his direct remarks.

"Do you realize that you haven't called me anything?"

"You said not to call you professor."

He laughed. "What do you guess the boys called me at college?"

"I don't see how I could guess."

"They called me 'Bill'—'Bill Brewster.'"

I've been 'Bill Brewster' the most of the time ever since I was a sophomore."

"Your own name is better—much better."

"Giles?"

"Giles Brewster." She flushed.

"Then call me Giles Brewster."

"I—oh, I'll have to consider." Her eyes were bent upon her task.

"Ruth."

She looked up.

"What is this—it's a keepsake, truly enough—here are two locks of hair."

She took them from his hand. The professor's fingers laid back the gold foil wrapping—"and here's a photograph." He handed it to her. It was that of a soldier boy. She looked at it, and turned it.

"There's writing here."

"Please read it."

"Randolph Huntington, died, Antietam, September 17, 1862."

"That was my father's brother," she said after a moment.

"There's writing here, too." She examined the narrow bands of paper around the locks of hair. "One says 'Mine' and the other— 'His.'"

"They were sweethearts," said Brewster, gently.

"And she never married."

Brewster took the locks of hair, one brown and the other black, and looked at them carefully. He passed them back. A tear fell upon his hand from Ruth Huntington's eyes. "I—I couldn't help it," she said softly; "I think that was beautiful." She rose as she spoke.

Brewster grasped Ruth's hand. "So do I," he said.

The thrill of friendship that quickened Brewster's heart when he held Ruth's hand was not gone from him with the passing of the day. For some cause which he did not care to analyze, if, indeed, he realized at all that it existed, Brewster was awakened to a new loneliness in his solitary existence—and a new happiness; for it was easy to get a word of com-



"Brewster grasped Ruth's hand. 'So do I,' he said"



radeship with Ruth at some hour of almost any day.

More and more he found himself wishing to talk with her, a most natural want in the wholly retrospective and introspective state induced by his enforced idleness and the constant activity of mind which harried and preyed upon him. It was a relief to speak out loud to some one besides himself. Day after day he was grieved and amazed by the condition of his eyes. At times the conclusion was almost forced upon him that they were steadily growing worse rather than better.

Anxious letters from Martha threw him into fits of depression that seemed unbearable. His life had been so busy and filled with plans for their common interest; now it was like a blank wall, a forsaken cause. It was in one of these moods that he deliberately watched half an afternoon to ascertain just when Dr. Huntington was away, and Mrs. Tremaine in the hammock on the back lawn, and Percival safely engaged in some innocent deviltry in his

grandfather's barn. Then he went to the open front door and walked in, as he had been bidden by Dr. Huntington to do whenever he chose. "Ruth," he called; "Ruth!" She appeared at the head of the stairs.

"I was in the library—won't you come up—it's shaded and very cool here now."

Dr. Huntington's library was not pretentious, but was exceptionally well chosen. For thirty-five years it had been his pleasure and pastime, and had grown accordingly. Ruth had spent nearly as much time there as he since she came to a reading age.

"What have you read?" asked the professor, glancing along the shelves and gazing into the separate cases; "what do you like best, I mean; what do you make your specialty?"

"Oh, I've read little I didn't want to. After that, perhaps I oughtn't to say what I have read. I haven't been conscientious."

She laughed—a frank little laugh.

The professor threw himself into an easy

chair by the broad south window; she remained standing.

"Do you read American fiction?"

"Not the recent sort, as a rule. I can't and be patient. Though I suppose there's grain in the chaff."

"Oh, yes. If sincerity were honored as are the fads and trash we'd have a fine literature; but in the nature of things the school worth while won't be the school of written-for-market stuff. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is beautiful unless it's true. The joy of my own work, the work that I love, was to show how fine the true things are!"

"I haven't thought enough about what I read—as you have," she said.

"What I expected to do this fall," he went on, "was to make a text-book of literary criticism. I had my ideas well outlined when I was—when I was killed!" Brewster uttered the word with sudden bitter intensity.

"Oh, you mustn't, you mustn't say that; it isn't so!"

He turned toward her with a smile slowly lighting his face.

Ruth spoke: "I am not well informed, and I should make mistakes, but if you could use *my* eyes, do you suppose it would help you about that book?"

"I have all my material," he answered; for the moment he was quite too surprised to say any words of thanks.

At length they came to him: "It would be a great, very great kindness that I could never forget, if you helped me. If I could do something on my book it would lift me up!"

"I should get more help than I could give. I would like to learn——"

There was a resounding tread across the floor of the front porch.

"We'll talk about this some more—soon," said Ruth.

Brewster's worst fears were confirmed a moment later; the caller proved to be Charles Edwards.

CHAPTER X

“SAM’L,” said Benjamin Gilbert to Dr. Huntington, “how’s Brewster? He ain’t been down for a week or so.”

“Ben, the fact is Brewster’s doing too much hard work thinking. It isn’t good for him.” The doctor closed his pocket medicine case with a snap.

Benjamin Gilbert had been ailing for several days. He was up, however, and on his broad piazza in the morning sun.

“Sam’l, can’t we cheer him up? He’s got good sand.”

“Sand! He’s almost got too much; that’s what makes him fight so hard—he’s fretting like a race-horse.”

“How air his eyes?”

“They’re bad, and going to be for some time; these railroad shake-ups hurt a man from his heels to his head, and it’s often in his head that he feels the whole hurt—with Brewster it

happens to be his eyes; but he's hurt all over. The only thing that'll help him is time; and he's fighting time every minute; he's talked to me about himself, and I know well enough where the trouble lies."

Two wildly frivolous black and white kittens dashed through the open door and chased up Dr. Huntington's legs to his lap and plunged across intervening space to the lap of Benjamin Gilbert, who grasped and held them gently with his big hands.

"I got these from Brewster; he had too many, and wouldn't drown 'em. I took 'em to make him feel right."

Dr. Huntington smiled and rose to go.

"If you happen to see Brewster this mornin' tell him to run down my way any time he feels like it; I wish I was a young feller and could take a hold of him good, and get him gay."

"Young feller? Why, Ben, you're one of the youngest fellers in Tolltown!" The doctor stood by his mare's head at the hitching-post;

two seconds later he was in his carriage.

"Good-by, Ben."

"Good-by, Sam'l."

And the country doctor was up the road in a cloud of summer dust.

Brewster received his message, and at two that afternoon started for Benjamin Gilbert's. The big man stood in front of his cottage as Brewster drew near.

"Some folks call me eccentric," said Benjamin Gilbert, "because I have tomatoes growin' at the top o' my piazza."

Brewster laughed. He had often wondered at the spectacle of Benjamin Gilbert's large white tubs of tomatoes, one at each end of the piazza roof. There was a stout little ladder by means of which one climbed to the roof to water the mid-air plants.

"The point is," the big man continued, "them plants get all th' sun there is, an' I get tomatoes two weeks ahead of anybody in th' neighborhood."

Brewster laughed again. "You generally have good reasons!" he remarked. The two men sat on the piazza and talked on topics horticultural and sociological.

Benjamin Gilbert's keen eye presently discerned a woman's figure far up the road. He turned to Brewster with a smile.

"Ruth Huntington's comin' to see us," he said.

"That's good!" exclaimed Brewster.

She was soon there. She came up the walk and stepped upon the piazza, smiling and answering their greeting; she gave her hand to Benjamin Gilbert and then to Brewster. She removed her simple white hat from her glorious hair and sat on the bench beside Brewster. "You two," she said, "are going to the Grange picnic Thursday."

"Where do they have it this year, Ruth?"

"And what is it?" asked the professor.

"Well, it's to be over on the Chapman place, by Boulder River, and it is the picnic that everybody in Tolltown Street goes to once a

year—you'll go, won't you?" Her eyes were looking into Brewster's.

"Why, why, yes, I'll go."

"Certainly you'll go," said Benjamin Gilbert; "you'll ride over with me if I'm able to stand up and harness a horse; and if I ain't you can take my mare and buggy; we'll consider it settled right now."

"All right," said Brewster.

Brewster walked home with Ruth that afternoon. He spoke of the help she had offered to give him on his book. "When it's done it must be attractive. I'd like to make it available for general reading as well as for text-book purposes. I'd taken notes for two years. I remember most of them without looking at them much, and can dictate to you, so that you can understand what we are doing by reference to the notes as we go along."

"You may find me little help."

"The kindness is almost too great; I don't know that I have the right to accept it."

"If you don't let me try I shall be disap-

pointed. I've been thinking of it, and I want to do it. You see, I was at college only two years, and just when I should have gone on systematically with my interests in literature I dropped it. Now, will you let me gain all I can from you—and your book?"

Brewster's reply was exultant; the girl had fired him with the prospective joy of Doing and Living again. "We'll begin work any day after the Grange picnic you say; I'm going to get the matter from my trunk to-night, and have it in order in twenty-four hours." They were at the Huntington maples. Percival Tremaine came across the lawn with a whoop.

"Grange picnic Thursday," said Ruth.

"Yes," said Brewster; "good-night."

"Good-night." She watched him as he walked rapidly to his own yard and entered the cottage at the little dining-room ell.

Thursday not being a bank holiday, it seemed tolerably clear that the Grange picnic must lack the presence of the Cashier of the

Tolltown Savings Bank. Nearly every one else of importance in Tolltown Street was able to attend. There was a steady stream of vehicles from South and East Tolltown through the Street; at the Baptist Church corner they took the turnpike that leads to Mixville; following this for two miles, they then took a cross road to the northwest that brought them to the banks of the Boulder River, where it lies broad and smooth and shines in the sun like a gleaming lake. The old-fashioned Chapman homestead is surrounded by trees that have so grown and encompassed the house and filled the great front yard with shade that one gets the impression of a grove in driving into the yard. Here were the long tables, laden with edibles brought by "Grange" housewives, in baskets and round wooden boxes of the old-fashioned sort that remind one of the earlier children of the old New England country. So often, to-day, "abandoned farm" were a happy euphemism for "foreign occupancy."

Brewster rode over with Benjamin Gilbert.

The Huntingtons went in their double team—Ruth, Mrs. Tremaine and her son, and Jonathan Steele, the driver. Brewster found more than one old acquaintance of his father's and was kept busy meeting people for a while, since Benjamin Gilbert took him around for the express purpose. "When you can meet pretty near all the Yankees there air left in Tolltown, you better," said Benjamin Gilbert; "maybe there won't be any when you're as old as I am."

The Reverend Matthew Lingane was at the picnic, and wore a straw hat with a brim the narrowness of which gave a decided impression of asceticism. Mrs. Henry Bishop recognized the proprieties of a day so festal by adorning her person with a dress of bottle-green color, trimmed, apparently, with white crochet work done by the lady's own fair hands. A dash of pink in her bonnet lighted her face. Robert Wright was present wearing a collar and a yellow satin necktie with the design of a rooster embroidered boldly thereon in red worsted. The effect was at once ornate and rakish. Mr.

Wright chewed no tobacco, but smoked a dangerous looking cigar, which indeed he later discovered to have been "loaded" with red pepper. This villainy had been accomplished through the machinations of his professional and personal enemy, Eben Rider. Mr. Rider was resplendent in a "biled" shirt and a pale blue necktie, which had the effect of making his sixty years seem like a fairy tale; he boyishly followed Mr. Wright about to torment him. "Sonny, I want you t' be a good boy t'day, an'—careful, sir, careful, sir, 'bout them feet o' yourn—they're a pintin' th' wrong way, sonny!" Whereupon Mr. Wright burst forth in language so strong that big John Farwell, Grange Master, put a sudden quietus upon him.

Young Mrs. Starkweather, with her children three, came to the picnic. The father, mother and sister of Charles Edwards were there. Everybody who was anybody for miles around; dwellers in the Street, farmers, wives, children, old folks, young folks, sweethearts—

all were playing, talking, walking, straying.

Dinner hour came before Brewster knew it. He had scarcely seen Ruth Huntington all the forenoon, so busy had they both been kept. But at the table she sat at his right hand. Mrs. Tremaine was at his left. Next beyond Ruth was Benjamin Gilbert. Directly across the table were the Reverend Matthew Lingane and Mrs. Bishop. A certain hauteur was observable in the manner of Mrs. Bishop toward Brewster. She had never forgiven him for his final acute understanding of the letter episode. The Starkweather children, with their mother, were seated a short distance away; the waxen-faced infant sitting in his mother's lap now and then raising a scream which was stifled by a bit of cake. Percival Tremaine was unable to sit at table, having eaten sweets during the forenoon, which so disagreed with him that he now reposed on cushions cast upon the ground beneath a tree not far away.

The dinner passed without other special in-

cident than the consumption of a quantity of food by the Reverend Mr. Lingane that might have aroused suspicion as to the sufficiency of his landlady's table. He had recently gone to board with Mrs. Henry Bishop.

"I didn't help wait on table, so I shall help clear away," said Ruth to Brewster; "then I'll come to the tree where Percival is now."

"I'll meet you there; and I'd like you to go on the river with me; there are boats down by the bank, and I've got one for the afternoon—will you come?"

She smiled frankly. "Yes."

At two they were on the river.

"I hadn't the easiest time getting Mr. Lingane to excuse me," said Ruth, dabbling her hand in the water; "he wanted me to go rowing with him."

"He can take Mrs. Bishop," said Brewster; "I doubt if I could. Anyway, he'll have to swim if he catches us now; I believe I make him out standing on the bank there watching us."

Ruth turned: "Yes, that is he." Brewster bent to the oars easily and sent the boat straight across the water. He was headed for the great arm that lies back into the country between the wooded hills at the north. The long afternoon was theirs; and yet how short it seemed. They talked and planned for the work upon his book, which he told her could not be begun as soon as he had thought; for he found it necessary to send to New York for several reference books which were indispensable. As the coming Monday would be Labor Day, the books would hardly be forwarded by the publishers soon enough to reach him before Wednesday or Thursday, which would be a week from that day.

He mapped out his proposed introductory chapter. She listened intently and betrayed to him that she caught the essence of what they were to do.

Dusk came upon them while they were yet far across the river. At last he rowed back. Long afterward he remembered how her white

dress shone in the radiant dimness that enfolded them as the first faint star rays fell on the waters; and how he saw that she was cold, and gave her his coat to wrap about her slender shoulders.

When they came up from the shore they found the yard deserted. A few were in the farmhouse, with the Chapmans; among them Mrs. Tremaine and Percival, and Benjamin Gilbert.

The Huntington team drove away first. Brewster rode home with Benjamin Gilbert, silent, under the silent stars. His heart was full. It had been a day of planning, hoping, believing. It had been one of those days that leave an impress on the soul; in the stress of after years the remembrance becomes ever better and fairer.

As his head sank to rest on his pillow that night the lapping of the waters, the gentle rippling of the waves against their boat, was in his ears; and he saw a face and dreamily said:

“Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o’er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.”

And he slept.

CHAPTER XI

UNTIL the day he began his work with Ruth Huntington Brewster lived as one in an ecstatic dream. He whistled as he performed his household duties. Took Jemima the cat on his lap and sang college songs to her. Called on Benjamin Gilbert in so happy a frame of mind that the big man smiled after he had gone, and walked with a lighter step. The reference books he had sent for came, and he was ready.

At three in the afternoon of that day he took them under his arm with his data, and went into the Huntington house. It was the appointed hour, and Ruth was waiting. Together they went to the library. They had already talked so much of what they were to do that she was able at once to begin looking up references for him. She verified and copied quotations, deciphered his roughly written notes, and wrote out what he requested. For

an hour, perhaps, his brain worked easily. His elation carried him. He had almost no warning of ill, up to the very moment when a violent, excruciating pain seized his forehead; it was as though a hand of steel gripped him there; he was suddenly powerless to frame the sentence that he had half forced to his lips; his brain refused to work; his eyes sought the paper he held in his hand; they failed him utterly; for the moment he could distinguish nothing.

"I—I can't see—I—I couldn't think; I'm—*worthless!*" The word escaped him in his agony, as a conclusive sense of mental helplessness fiercely, viciously attacked him. In all the months since his accident, he had never known till that instant how hurt, how damaged he was. He dropped the papers in his hand and they fluttered to the floor as he sank back in his chair. Light seemed gone from life; strength from manhood; he had been robbed of everything; not even a fair chance to fight was his; the very foundations of faith fell away

from him as he uttered the word "worthless!"

A voice, gentle, compassionate, called to his quivering senses: "Oh, you mustn't say that! It isn't so! It isn't so at all—we—I've let you do too much!" Two hands rested upon his own; he took them, and firmly held them.

His forehead was wet with the sweat of struggle; a pitiless steel clutch seemed fastened within.

"Something has *happened* to my head!" he said.

Ruth trembled, and gently withdrew her hands from him.

"Let me see if papa is home. He started early—maybe he's back!" She went quickly away. In two or three minutes, she re-entered the library. "He's there in his office. I told him you'd be down."

She followed him to the stairs and made sure that he grasped the stair rail, and could see well enough to descend safely. He went out at the front door, cut across the lawn, and

went in at the side entrance. She listened intently and heard her father open and close the office door. Then she turned back, and gathered up Giles Brewster's papers and laid them carefully in a drawer.

Dr. Huntington listened while Brewster briefly described his sensations.

"Mr. Brewster," he said, "you are no worse than you were yesterday, or any day since your accident. Only, you've found it out. Nature and care and time can make you better; drugs would make you worse. Your head symptoms are the usual story. In cases of nervous shock they always come sooner or later. You have been living for months in a restless, uneasy, half-stunned state; perhaps now that you've so suddenly awakened to suffering you'll get better all the faster." The doctor rose, and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. Brewster had been pacing the room. "Come," he continued, "believe in your future, and let your neighbors make your present better; we haven't done for you what we'd like; you don't

come to the house often enough. .You spend too much time alone. And you must ride over the hills with me!"

Brewster's throat filled with emotion as he thought of all they had done for him from the moment he had known them—as he thought of Ruth. He was unstrung, and able only to look his gratitude into the keen eyes that saw the misery in his own.

"I don't know about your housekeeping arrangements," said Dr. Huntington; "I don't know that you are careful enough to eat regularly and properly. Are you?"

"I suppose I have been careless."

"You mustn't be; you will be welcome at our table; when you choose, come in; don't eat cold food when we have hot. We shall expect you often."

"As for those eyes of yours," continued the doctor, "I wish you could see Willston, of Hartford; he's my man for the eye. If you're inclined, we'll run in and see Willston some day, soon. I want to see him myself."

"Thank you, sir. I would like to."

Dr. Huntington stood by his office window and watched Brewster's tall figure as he went down the driveway. He walked like a man grimly advancing to battle, and disappeared into his cottage.

Ruth entered her father's office.

"Papa," she said.

He turned.

"What do you think—about Mr. Brewster?"

"He won't use his head or his eyes, either, for a while."

"Can't anything be done?"

"I'm going to take him to Willston; but we must do what we can here to help him; in about an hour you go across and invite him to dinner. Tell him I expect him. We'll do the same thing as often as we can."

She passed from the office. Later she rapped at Brewster's door.

"Giles Brewster!" she said.

"Oh!" he answered; "come in!" He had

been lying on the couch, but rose to a sitting posture.

"I can't, now; we want you to come to dinner; papa expects you!" She was gone before he could answer.

After dinner, at Brewster's request, Ruth played upon the piano for him. Dr. Huntington came into the parlor at nine, and asked him if he could run into Hartford with him the next day to see Willston.

Brewster agreed, and rose to go.

"We won't think about doing work till after Willston," he said to Ruth, as he bade her good-night.

"Not till you are better. Dr. Willston can help your eyes, I'm sure. And while we're waiting, you must tell me things to read, so I'll know more when we begin again."

"I'll tell you," he answered, and was conscious of a certain happiness despite his pain, despite his utter disappointment.

The next day, Willston, the Hartford ocu-

list, examined Brewster's eyes with exceeding care, and gave him a prescription for glasses.

"How do you find my eyes? Can I use them soon—work with them?"

"Not soon."

"In three months?"

"No."

"In six?"

"Come again in three months; then I'll tell you more."

Willston placed his hands in the pockets of his velvet office jacket with an air of finality. "There's a good chance for you to improve, after a while, sir. Keep out of doors, and build up the general health. That's correct, Dr. Huntington?"

"Yes."

Willston removed his hands from his pockets, and bade the two men good-day.

Brewster went back to Tolltown not without hope, after all, but with the hardest of all battles before him. The battle of the man who waits.

CHAPTER XII

BENJAMIN GILBERT was discovered by Brewster at nine the next morning sitting in the sun on his piazza.

“Good-mornin’—excuse me if I don’t get up—my friend is dreadful comfortable—his singin’ sounds like a band!” The yellow and white half-grown kitten was curled up on the big shoulder pouring forth a pæan of rapture. Benjamin Gilbert’s hand was stretched out to Brewster, and gave him a hearty grasp.

The professor drew a chair, and sat down. “I’ve seen the oculist,” he said.

“That’s good—that’s real good! He’s goin’ t’ fix you up, ain’t he?”

Brewster smiled wanly. “I hope so.”

“Course he is—course he is, Brewster. Ruth was down t’ see me again after you got home last night. She seemed real encouraged about you. An’—it’s good medicine for any man t’ have Ruth Huntington encouraged about

him. He's kinder got the angels on his side!"

Brewster brightened. "Well, I've thought it over, and viewed the situation from all sides and I've come to a conclusion; I know what I'm going to do."

"Course you do; what is it?"

"I'm going to work on my wood lot."

Benjamin Gilbert slapped his knee. "Just what I thought! An' just what you ought t' do. Why don't you hire one of Edwards' steam saw mills, an' get a gang t' work, an' market your timber this fall? Nothin' to hinder, is there?"

"I wanted to consult you about it. I don't know exactly how to go at it."

"Well, I shall tell you. In the first place, see Edwards. He's President of the Lumber Company. I own a mite o' stock in it myself. You tell Edwards you want a mill set up on the lower side of your lot, an' then you just get a gang to choppin', and another gang to haulin', an' we'll have them trees turned into

cash before you know it. I'll kinder set things goin' myself. I'll start the gangs t' work, if you want me to. An' I'll see if the Lumber Company won't advance some cash for wages—advance commission—'cause maybe you could do business through the company, in a way. We've got a ready market. I'm feelin' fine, this mornin', Brewster, an' I've ben thinkin' the matter over before you came down this mornin', an' I'd made up my mind I'd go up to the village to-day if you was willin', and see some parties for you." The big man's eyes shone with interest and enthusiasm.

Over on the hill a crow cawed in the clear air. The yellow and white kitten on Benjamin Gilbert's shoulder reached up and playfully clawed his ear. Brewster's eyes grew misty. "You're good to me," he said.

"Now look a here, Brewster—neighbors air *neighbors*. What do you want me to do? Screw up m' face, an' look mean?"

Brewster laughed. "You couldn't."

"Well, if my ambitions run in that way, I

guess I should try to control 'em. Now the point is, Brewster, I'm dreadful glad you air sensible. This wood lot's going to give you something t' do, and something to think about. Probably you'll be a well man by the time you've marketed your timber. Lord, there's a lot of it; an' ties an' cord wood besides."

Brewster drew a deep breath, and threw back his shoulders. "I'm lucky to own that wood lot."

"Course you air. Brewster, 'most everybody is lucky. Only they don't know it. It's nature in some folks t' cultivate trouble instead of hoein' it out. You're goin' t' hoe it out! Put not your trust in trouble. It ain't any kind of a crop!"

"Of course I couldn't help being disappointed about my eyes," said Brewster, thoughtfully.

"Well, no; I don't blame you for that. I know it's a grief to you. But I'm bound t' say, Brewster, that any man that ain't had any

grief, and borne it, ain't a man—he's just a child."

Brewster rose from his chair, walked to the end of the piazza, turned, and came back. "Mr. Gilbert, I'm going to make the try of my life!"

"My boy, I know you air. Now, set down, an' we'll discuss the details of this wood lot matter."

Brewster stayed to dinner. In the afternoon Benjamin Gilbert walked up to the village with him, and the first arrangements were made for an early start on the wood lot. Mr. Charles Edwards, the brisk, business-like young President of the Lumber Company, had twirled the ends of his blond mustache very thoughtfully indeed, at first, and his rosy cheeks were puffed out after the manner of a man who hesitates, when Benjamin Gilbert suggested that they ought to advance cash for the beginning of operations. Brewster discerned Edwards' attitude quickly enough, and at once gave up the idea, preferring by all

means to use money of his own which he still had—the remaining earnings of his professional years. The other plan would have been an accommodation, but perhaps on that account a disadvantage.

That evening a letter came from Martha, which Brewster read in his little dining-room by the light of his biggest and brightest lamp.

“DEAR GILES: Your letters to me are shorter and shorter, and I simply don’t think it is right for you to keep on giving me no satisfaction. You know I love you, dear, and you must tell me what you think you will be able to do, and how soon. My work at the library ends the 15th. I have nothing else in view. I suppose I shall have to stay at home a while, which you know is hard, considering that father is getting old and does not earn as much as when the children were small. He has just had his wages cut again at the shop.”

“Poor father!” said Brewster, and then sat in utter silence for a long time.

He had written little to Martha because all

the strength of his eyes had been given to preparing for the work on the book that had ended so disastrously. He had felt that there was nothing of interest to her to be written until he had demonstrated that he could work again.

"Martha," he slowly said, as the quick little clock finished striking nine, "I'm afraid I've done you an injustice. Of course it's hard for a girl to go on waiting indefinitely."

"I'll write to her as soon as I've got the wood lot scheme going," he said, as he went to bed. He lay awake not long, being soothed by the sound of a reverie Ruth Huntington was playing. The soft music floated in at his open window.

CHAPTER XIII

IN LESS than a week a steam saw mill was being set up on Brewster's wood lot, which was on one of a chain of hills north of the Street. The saw mill gang would begin operations about the first week in October. A shift of wood-choppers was already busy. Before spring, teamsters could begin drawing lumber and cord wood to South Tolltown Depot for shipment to purchasers.

First frost had come, and the wooded hills for miles were glorious in ten thousand shades of coloring—riotous, superb, royal. Brewster had been all the forenoon on his wood lot, and left for dinner at twelve.

Approaching his cottage, he observed, as he came close, that the door at the dining-room ell was not closed; he was sure he had left it latched. He entered; Martha Bemis confronted him; neither spoke; he opened his arms to her.



“Neither spoke; he opened his arms to her”



She soon found words to say.

"Oh, Giles, why haven't you written me? I couldn't wait any longer, and I just came!"

The plaintiveness of the woman's husky-sweet voice smote him. "Dear!" he said, and caressed her. Her strong arms reached up, and again twined about his neck. He kissed her, and she released him. She sat upon the couch, and he beside her. She played with his hair, like a mother fondling her only child.

"Tell me, dear, tell me why you didn't write about yourself. I had to come and see."

"Yes, dear. Yes. I didn't realize. I ought to have written more."

She laid her head on his shoulder. The fragrance of her hair made him catch his breath.

"Tell me about your eyes."

"Yes, yes, I will," he said, meantime trying to think of the easiest way to tell her. His next words were to gain time: "You've taken me by surprise. How did you find my cottage?"

"That tall girl next door told me. I asked if the Hunters lived there——"

"Huntingtons," corrected Brewster.

"I knew you lived next to the Huntingtons—you wrote me. Anyway, I simply said I was Miss Bemis, that you were engaged to be married to me, and I was looking for your cottage, and she said yes, this was it, but she thought you were away, and she asked me to come in, but I said I'd see for sure if you were home. Then I found your door unlocked; it's an awful small cottage, isn't it?"

"Rather small," said Brewster absently; "I suppose you came to South Tolltown and walked over here. If I'd known, I'd have met you with a team."

"It didn't hurt me to walk; I'm well. You don't look well at all. You look pale. You are thin. I don't believe you are well. How are your eyes? Why haven't you written me about your eyes? Are they lots better?"

Even as she spoke, the flush of Martha's

exuberant health deepened. A summer in the library had only preserved the perfection of her complexion; her color surged with every emotion.

Answering her questions one by one, sparing no detail, Brewster told her of his present condition, and repeated to her what the Hartford oculist had said regarding the future. Also he mentioned that he was just now attempting to do something with his wood lot.

"So you tried to work, and couldn't, and there's no knowing when you can?"

"That's the situation," said Brewster wearily.

Martha carefully picked off a white thread that clung to the skirt of her dark red dress; a most becoming shade, it was. The waist was especially pretty.

"You don't think that wood lot will amount to so very much, do you?" she queried.

"I can't tell," he answered.

Martha sighed, and straightened a coil of her tawny hair.

Brewster rose from beside her. "We'll have some dinner," he said.

"Show me where things are, and I'll help."

"I'll light the fire first; we burn wood in Tolltown, and it goes out if you leave it long."

Martha followed him to the kitchen. He heard a rap, and went to the door of the dining-room ell; Ruth Huntington was there.

"Come in."

She stepped just inside. "We want you"—she hesitated for a second—"we would like you and Miss Bemis to take dinner with us. Will you let us help you entertain?"

Brewster hesitated, awkwardly.

"Please don't think we've meant to intrude," said Ruth; "but I thought, we thought, you weren't prepared for company, and——"

She stopped, suddenly conscious that the sentence was complete enough. Her face was scarlet, though her voice had been matter of fact, and her tone only slightly tense.

"You are good," murmured Brewster. "Martha," he called.

She came from the kitchen.

"Miss Huntington, let me present Miss Bemis."

Ruth offered her hand, and Martha took it.

"We've met before, only we didn't know we were meeting, then," said Martha.

Ruth gravely smiled.

"Martha," began Brewster, "the Huntingtons invite us to take dinner with them."

"You are ever so kind, to go to that trouble," said Martha to Ruth.

"It is no trouble; may we expect you—in a few minutes—at your own convenience?" Ruth turned to Brewster as she spoke the last words.

"Yes, thank you," he answered.

Not long after dinner Martha Bemis had received and accepted an invitation to stay at Dr. Huntington's over night, and for as long as she might remain in Tolltown Street. Brewster was grateful for the arrangement, though keenly feeling that he could do or say nothing which would adequately convey to his

neighbors the depth of his appreciation. As for Martha, she was charmed with the idea, and with the Huntingtons themselves, to whom she spoke freely that afternoon regarding the discouraging condition of Brewster's eyes; also mentioning unreservedly her disappointment at what she now perceived must be the indefinite postponement of their marriage. Mrs. Tremaine she found conversational, and a sympathetic listener as well. Ruth listened intently, but, as was her wont, said little.

Martha and Mrs. Tremaine and Ruth had been together a couple of hours when Brewster got back from a necessary trip to his wood lot, where men were chopping along the boundary line of his property. Martha had been watching for him, and went at once to the cottage.

Until the supper hour they were again together, alone; and she spoke no word of plaint or discouragement to him, for he craved to be comforted; and she told him, as she used to do, that she loved him. Only once, her voice broke, when she told him that her "little" sister Nellie

was engaged, and expected to be married by Thanksgiving time or earlier. "I'll be the only one left, then, Giles."

"Poor girl," he answered, and stroked her hair, and passed his hand over her forehead. It was a pretty forehead; not high, not broad; but pretty. Once he had thought it was not less than beautiful. Brewster had the poet's tendency to idealize.

It so happened that Charles Edwards dropped in at the Huntingtons' late that afternoon, and remained until he was invited to supper. To Martha Bemis was therefore granted the privilege of meeting him. He was the life of the party at the supper table. It was indeed difficult to escape his geniality. Martha was not sure she liked him, at the very first; but his jokes concerning the professor on a wood lot soon caused her to laugh quite unrestrainedly. The professor felt ill at ease on the occasion of a joke or two, but concealed his embarrassment rather than mar the pleasure of the others. Dr. Huntington and his daughter Ruth appeared

to be too busy as host and hostess to appreciate to the uttermost the merriment about them.

After supper Mr. Edwards favored with a song, shortly after which he took Ruth out for the evening to an entertainment in the town hall for the benefit of the Tolltown Street Library Association.

Brewster and Martha soon were alone, with the Huntingtons' parlor at their disposal for the evening.

"I suppose Ruth and Mr. Edwards are engaged," remarked Martha; "I think he's lovely."

Brewster stroked a sun-gold strand of her tawny hair.

"Are they?"

"Are what?" asked Brewster.

"Engaged, you stupid—Ruth and Mr. Edwards."

"Oh—I don't know."

"Well, you *are* stupid. I should think anybody would know that. He acts just as though she was his."

"That's his way; perhaps they are engaged, though I don't know."

"He's nice looking; I think his mustache is *handsome*."

"Magnificent," said Brewster.

"Now you're sarcastic."

She rubbed her cheek against his. His head ached furiously; he wished she would smooth his forehead; but she began talking again.

"He's in the lumber business, from what he said; is he rich?"

"I don't know; he's cashier at the Savings Bank here."

"Oh, he must be rich."

"His folks are considered well to do, I believe. And he's successful in business himself; that's all I know about his riches."

"He's a splendid catch for Ruth."

Brewster was silent.

"I'd just like to know if she *is* engaged to him."

"I should hope not," he said almost sharply.

"You're cross," she said in a hurt tone.

"Forgive me, dear; I don't believe I'm feeling well to-night; my head aches."

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid it's going to ache all the time. If you don't get better what *shall* I do?"

He turned to her compassionately. "Give me up, dear; I haven't the right to spoil your life!"

"Oh, Giles, you know I'll *never* give you up! I promised to marry you—and we *shall* be married—only this being engaged and not ever getting married is awfully wearing—awfully."

"For us both, dear."

She pillowed her head on his shoulder.

A little after nine he said good-night, and went to his cottage.

Martha appeared at the cottage before Brewster had prepared his breakfast, and said he was expected next door. So he breakfasted with Martha, Mrs. Tremaine and Percival, and Ruth. The doctor had started away early on a long trip. This breakfast happened to be the first he had taken at the Huntingtons' since

the week of his arrival in Tolltown, and it vividly recalled to his mind the early kindness of his neighbors. He mused throughout the meal, and was twice playfully called to account by Martha, whereupon he smiled, and began again to eat the irreproachable griddle cakes of the irreproachable cook, Jane. Jane was fifty, and unmarried, and for many years had openly scorned all men except Dr. Huntington, until Brewster came to Tolltown. Him, she secretly favored, delighting always in his presence at the Huntington table.

Immediately after breakfast, Brewster went up to the little barber shop back of Randall's store. He could not see well enough to shave his own face safely that morning.

It was a bright, warm morning, such as frequently comes in the New England country after first frosty weather. Rob Wright tripped along in front of him, picturesquely toeing in, as Brewster emerged from the barber shop cleanly shaved. Mr. Wright requested the loan of five cents. Brewster gave it to him.

"I heard your girl's here. S'pose you're goin' t' git married?" said Rob Wright.

Brewster's good nature faded. He crossed the street at a pace which Mr. Wright's feet could not have imitated. On the central green in front of his cottage he saw Martha, playing with the Starkweather children. She seized the infant from its carriage, and ran to the veranda of the dining-room ell with it, arriving there at the moment Brewster did. The infant wriggled, took a deep breath, and sent forth a shriek.

"There, there, there!" crooned Martha, holding it close; "there, there!"

"Why, Giles, there must be something the matter with the baby, poor little thing—there, there!"

"There *is* something the matter with it," said Brewster, when it paused for a moment.

"What?" asked Martha.

"Well, for one thing it's a twenty-seven devil power imp!"

"Why, Giles Brewster, I never heard you talk that way in my life! You're wicked!"

"Probably, but I've been listening to that infant scream for the last four months, at all hours of day or night."

As though to confirm evil report, the infant began another screaming fit.

"It's a baby, and it can't help it—there, there! You don't like it because it *is* a baby," said Martha, accusingly; "some men don't, and it's shameful!"

Brewster entered his cottage. The shrieks hurt his head. Martha presently left the veranda with it, still screaming, as fast as breath could be renewed.

Looking out of the window a little later, Brewster saw his *fiancée* engaged in conversation with the infant's mother, on the green. Ruth Huntington and Mrs. Tremaine passed by and up the street. Rev. Matthew Lingane came down. He stepped jauntily across the road and upon the velvet of the green, advancing to Mrs. Starkweather.

Martha and Mr. Lingane were made acquainted.

Brewster retired to his kitchen. Soon he heard Martha's footfall on the veranda. She came through to the kitchen.

"I've had a lovely time; people are awfully social here, aren't they? I met the pastor. Mrs. Starkweather introduced me."

"Who introduced Mrs. Starkweather?"

"Why, her baby, of course!" Martha laughed.

"Did they ask you when you and I were going to be married?"

"Why, yes; the pastor did."

"And what did you say, Martha?"

"I said we expected to be married as soon as your health would allow—and, why, I don't remember—we just talked in general."

Brewster was silent.

Martha came to Brewster, and laid her head on his shoulder. "Please, don't be cross," she said forgivingly. He brightened. "Perhaps I'm too sensitive; I don't like people to be over

inquisitive; in a small town like this things are gossiped about; and gossip cheapens. I don't like my marrying or my not marrying to be on the tongue of everybody. I know you didn't mean any harm, Martha; we'll forget all about it!" She clung to him; and her face was happy when she let him go.

After their cozy dinner in the cottage together, Martha and Brewster went to Ruth Huntington's to ask her to go with them to Benjamin Gilbert's. Brewster had long ago written to Martha of the music on Benjamin Gilbert's piazza, and now she wished to hear it. Ruth consented to go; there was no outward sign of any reluctance which may have possessed her. One is not always in a playing mood. She brought forth her cornet, and they all three walked down the road. The brim of Martha's pretty gray Fall hat touched Brewster's shoulder. Ruth was bareheaded.

Benjamin Gilbert received his callers with wonted cordiality; to Martha, his great, pleasant presence strongly appealed; she was im-

pressed by characteristics physical, as well as mental, in man. She would even have loved Brewster less deeply if he had not been the tall, square-shouldered fellow he was.

Benjamin Gilbert, in turn, recognized readily the charm of Martha's rosy health, and saw how pretty she was, and understood why Brewster had admired her. Benjamin Gilbert had a wholesome appreciation of any woman's prettiness or goodness, or both.

The musical program that afternoon was not long. Martha expressed herself as delighted with the violin and cornet.

Brewster presently left the others on the piazza, and went down to Benjamin Gilbert's grist mill on an errand for him. The man to whom the mill had been sold had failed in every obligation, paid no interest money on the mortgage, and was just now on a spree so tremendous that business was suspended at the mill and the keys in Benjamin Gilbert's possession.

Brewster was delayed an hour by persons who chanced to come for meal.

On the piazza, Ruth Huntington was unusually silent, but Martha was conversational. She told Benjamin Gilbert of the plans she had had for marriage that fall, and spoke of her disappointment at Brewster's condition. She wondered if the wood lot would amount to much. He suggested to her that it would at least occupy Brewster's mind, and so help him to get well.

When Brewster returned, it was time to go. Benjamin Gilbert went to his gate with them, and stood there for some moments after they had taken leave.

"Durn!" he finally said, emphatically and compassionately, watching them all three, as they passed up the road. Martha Bemis walked in the middle, between Brewster and Ruth. Her deep red skirt was lifted above the dust of the country highway.

The next day, Saturday, Martha went home.

It was a crisp fall morning, with sunshine streaming everywhere, and the distance to

Mixville, behind Benjamin Gilbert's seldom used mare, was soon covered.

Martha urged Brewster to keep her closely informed as to the condition of his eyes, and he promised.

"But I don't expect to know much until the three months have gone, and I've seen the Hartford oculist again," he said, as he bade her good-by at the depot.

"We ought to know positively by then—positively."

"I hope so, dear; good-by."

"Good-by."

All the way back Brewster mused upon the vagary of Fate that had cut him off from his world and his work. When he saw Boulder River shining in the sun, he recalled that day he first walked to Tolltown Street; it seemed long ago. Then flashed upon him the remembrance of that splendid afternoon and that star-dim dusk, upon the river with Ruth Huntington. Strangely, that seemed still longer ago.

CHAPTER XIV

THE week after Martha went away was an exceedingly busy one for Brewster. He took a real interest in the work on his wood lot, and was there early and late.

Sunday came again, a glorious day of clear air and breezes laden with the almost aromatic quality characteristic of fall in the clean crisp New England country. At ten in the forenoon Brewster was seated on his piazza when Benjamin Gilbert drove up.

"You goin' t' meetin"? he called out. Brewster stepped out to the concord buggy. "Well, I hadn't decided——"

"Better take a ride with me, hadn't you? Pretty good religion ridin', this mornin'."

"I'd like to go with you."

"Jump in."

They drove out of the street, taking the turnpike road at the Baptist Church.

"Brewster," said Benjamin Gilbert, "I've

ben thinkin' it over a good deal, an' I've made up my mind you're one of the luckiest fellers that ever was."

Brewster smiled, and looked into the pleasant face. "You see, this wood lot's just th' thing for you; an' I've ben considerin' about that girl of yours. Why, with Marthy a waitin', and a lovin' you whilst she's waitin', you're goin' t' find out what woman's love means. 'Tain't every feller has such an opportunity before he gets married. Why, my boy, if that girl's willin' t' wait, she's provin' every day that she's just A number One—the kind of a woman that *sticks*. And, Lord, how a woman does stick when she loves a man!"

Brewster was silent for a moment. Benjamin Gilbert gazed at the far hills, and gently flicked his mare with the whip. They went rapidly on. "She'll be as patient as possible, of course," said the professor at length.

"My boy, it's the love of good women that does make the world go 'round. 'Tain't men's love that keeps the world goin'. It's the silent,

ever growin' current, th' eternal force, th' unseen influence of sacrificin', unselfish women; an' if it ain't that kind of love, why it ain't real love, an' it don't count, an' it just naturally peters out. Don't you expect that's so?"

"Why—yes—it has to stand the test——"

"That's it! That's it! It has to stand th' test! An' what I'm tryin' to congratulate you on is that your Marthy is growin' an' developin' an' strengthenin' in her real true love for you every day she's a waitin' an' hopin' an' prayin', and willin'ly livin' on with you in her mind, staunch as a soldier and never sayin' quits."

Brewster looked earnestly into the old man's big strong face. "How do you like Martha?" he asked squarely.

"Martha has got first rate qualities," said Benjamin Gilbert. "I could see that right away. Martha"—he paused deliberately—"is th' kind of a girl that when she gets married will desire nothin' better." Benjamin Gilbert touched the mare lightly with his whip, and

they rode swiftly along the leaf embowered road.

"I didn't mean to go preachin' to you, Brewster, but, durn it, I like you. An' likin' you, I wanted t' call attention to this situation of yours once more and make it plain to you that you're livin' a necessary part of life, an' learnin'. Learnin' as you go along. Now the loves of women air bound up in th' careers of all men. Therefore I've been discoursin' on the love of women. I ain't bothered you, have I?"

"Not a bit."

"Why, right in my own life I've seen more good, inspirin' examples amongst women kind than I'd a seen in a thousand years if there wa'n't women an' women's loves in our midst from th' day we're born. An' some of the saddest air some of the sweetest. Look at your Aunt Susalla! She was engaged to be married to Randolph Huntington. He went away to war an' got killed. Your Aunt Susalla's whole life, till the day she was taken, more'n forty years afterward, was filled with love for Ran-

dolph Huntington. She just *grew*, in her love for Randolph Huntington, right up to the hour she went to meet him in Eternity. An' all th' way along her path of life she gave love, an' charity, an' sweetness to her friends an' neighbors. It ain't the women that *get*, it's the women that *give* that really know how to love!"

"You're right!" said Brewster; "I know you're right. I never thought of it in that way before."

"Well, excuse my preachin'—I just wanted to fortify ye' a little, an' show ye' there's worse things than *waitin'*. How's operations goin' on the wood lot?"

"Very well," said Brewster; "and there are some things I'd like to ask you about."

"Fire away," said Benjamin Gilbert.

Brewster questioned, and the big man advised, as they rode on. They passed the Chapman place. Boulder River was shining in the sun, and far across reflected the gorgeous coloring of the autumn hillsides.

"I have a powerful notion," said Benjamin Gilbert, reining his mare across the bridge, "to drive over Wilton Mountain, an' out to Emmons-ville; there's a man out there, friend of mine, that makes some of th' best tastin' clarified cider you ever drank—you wouldn't object to drinkin' a little cider on Sunday, would you?"

"Not so that you'd notice it," said Brewster cheerfully.

"It's real good Sunday cider," assured the big man, "an'll take the place of dinner."

The journey over the mountain was beautiful. Benjamin Gilbert shortened the distance by a droll recital of how Rob Wright's reprehensible habit of profanity once on a time cost him the janitorship of the Congregational Church of Tolltown. The regrettable episode had occurred one cold winter Sunday when Mr. Wright, engaged in his duties as janitor, struggled with an ill-shaped and obstinate "chunk," which he tried to shove in at the door

of the wood-burning furnace; morning service was in progress; the more Mr. Wright struggled the less he succeeded, until at last he burst forth in a picturesque but awful torrent of bad words, which were wafted up through the big register and so affected Miss Judy Young and many other astounded worshippers that Mr. Wright lost his job ere another Sunday.

"Wasn't Rob Wright sorry?" queried the professor.

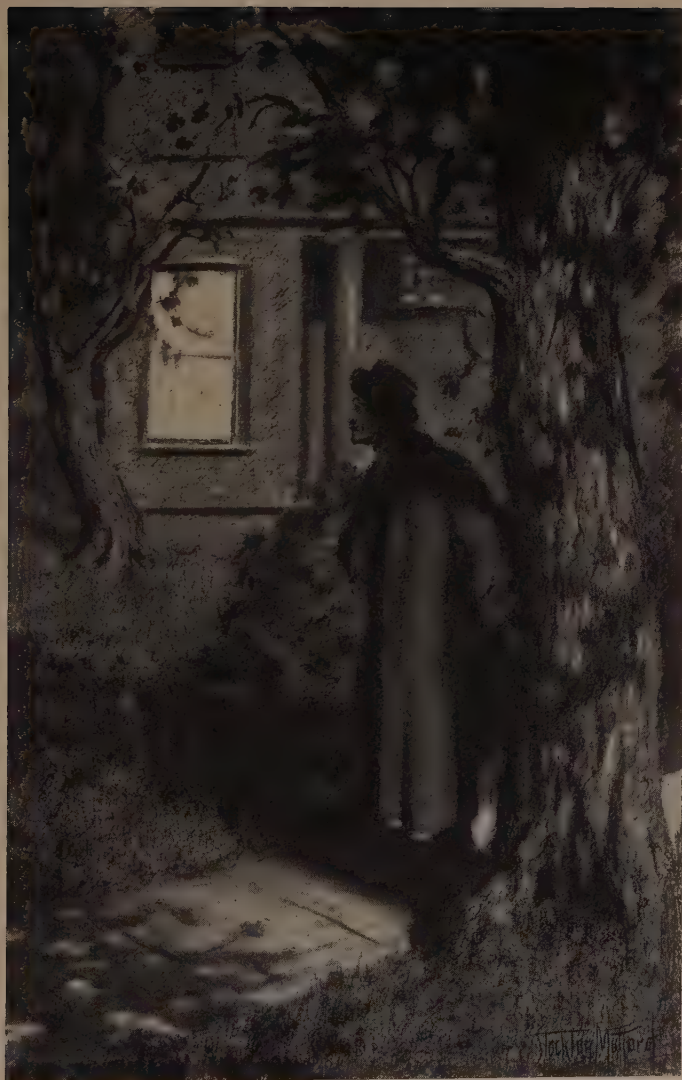
"He was sorry he got caught," said Benjamin Gilbert; "there's several folks in the world that way." And the big man gently flicked his mare with the whip.

They reached Emmonsville at two in the afternoon, and started back at three. Benjamin Gilbert had discovered a jug under the seat of his buggy; they took it away filled with new clarified cider, which, it was explained by the owner of the jug, was to be presented to Dr. Huntington.

Before six o'clock they had gotten as far on

the homeward journey as the Chapman place. Clouds were gathering above Wilton Mountain. "Looks like rain," commented Benjamin Gilbert; "there's a storm brewin'—a reg'ler drivin' fall storm—you c'n always tell at this time o' year by the look of the water when it catches th' look o' the sky at about this time o' day."

The remainder of the homeward journey was quickly done. Benjamin Gilbert's good mare seemed to feel the keen whisper of coming storm.



“Gazing blindly back into the brightly lighted parlor”

CHAPTER XV

CHARLES EDWARDS stood by night on the sidewalk in front of the residence of Dr. Samuel Huntington, gazing blindly back into the brightly lighted parlor where he had proposed to Ruth Huntington that she should marry him. Mr. Edwards was in a state of the most profound and joyless astonishment; Ruth Huntington had declined the honor of becoming his wife. She had declined with so little hesitancy that he had at first believed she had not understood him aright. He genially assured her that he meant it. She had declined again—so positively, so unmistakably, so absolutely, that he had gone as soon as possible into the open air.

On the sidewalk, alone, surrounded by the chastening gloom of the hour, he nervelessly toyed with a ring in his vest pocket which he had expected that night to place upon the fin-

ger of the future wife of Charles Edwards. He had proposed to grasp the prize, and to label it. It was difficult for him to believe that he was Charles Edwards. Ruth Huntington and Mr. Edwards were probably in that brightly lighted parlor and were discussing the date of their marriage. He, this man on the sidewalk in the chill night, was some fellow who might just as well leave the vicinity. He started. He passed by the cottage of one Brewster, and quite without intent, kicked with a most mighty kick an uneven flag which projected above the sidewalk level; he staggered; his gait for half a hundred yards resembled that of Robert Wright. In the weird semi-darkness one would have said that it was Robert Wright. He even cursed, like Robert Wright. So, he disappeared into the ever deepening gloom; the footfalls grew fainter and fainter. All was silence in front of the cottage of Brewster, save for the rustle of October leaves, dry and dead; the gusty night wind drove them beneath a starless sky;

a raindrop fell; then a thousand. The storm had come.

It was only a little time before it was observed that Charles Edwards no longer escorted Ruth Huntington home from church. Nor did he call at the Huntington house at all. He had called so incessantly that his present new habit seemed highly significant. "Guess they've had a fallin' out," said the gossipers.

The banker himself was strictly non-communicative. Ruth had no announcement of any sort to make for the gratification of the curious.

Her father one day called her into his office.

"Ruth," he said, "if Charles Edwards has asked you to marry him, and you've refused him, would you care if your father knew?"

"No, papa."

"It's true?"

"Yes."

"My dear daughter!" he said, and took her in his arms.

"I tried to keep him from asking me, papa, but it had to come."

"I'm glad it's over with," he answered.

She stroked his white hair, gently.

"Do you love any one else?"

"You," she said.

"You won't always have me, Ruth."

"Papa!"

"I'm lonely for your mother, sometimes, child."

"I know."

"The rides seem harder and longer than they did once, Ruth; I'm growing old; the winter, and the night calls, used to be easier."

"You've lived your life for other people."

"We do that, dear, if we live. It's the only happiness that lasts."

Ruth would have stayed longer in the office, but a patient came.

She returned not long after the patient had gone. Her father was asleep in his chair.

"He's tired," she said, and went softly away.

CHAPTER XVI

THE wind was howling down Giles Brewster's kitchen chimney, forcing the smoke of his wood fire into the room. It came forth now in puffs, now in slender threads and filmy streams, and slowly shifting clouds filled the kitchen, despite wide open window and door. The smoke seemed to be possessed of wicked design almost human. It got in Brewster's eyes and hurt extremely. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and he was hungry after a day on his wood lot.

"Guess I'll withdraw; never mind hot supper. Hot suppers are for millionaires and teamsters." Saying which, and groping his way from the kitchen faucet with a dish of water, Brewster opened the door to the dining-room, and passed in, shutting it quickly after him. Here was a comfortable fire not smoking at all, in a little wood burner which had a sufficiently large flat place on top to ac-

commodate the tin of water to be heated for cocoa.

Brewster's biggest lamp was burning brightly on the table and he sat down beside it. He was waiting, resting, when some one knocked at the door. Ruth Huntington stood there, a hooded cape drawn about her shoulders and partly over her hair.

"Come in," asked Brewster.

"For a minute."

"Please sit down by my stove," said Brewster.

She took a low rocking chair, and threw her cape across the back of it. Brewster put a stick of wood in the stove from the little wood box his Aunt Susalla had covered with wall paper.

"Papa expects you to supper to-night."

Brewster smiled rather mournfully. "That's three times this week he's expected me; I'm taking advantage of his expectations pretty often."

Ruth smiled with her usual frankness, and looked into his eyes.

"Do you know," she said, "when you talk to papa about the British poets he forgets all about what an outrage it is for you to take supper with us."

Brewster laughed, pleased by her air of good comradeship. Of late he had missed this. Ruth had appeared elusive and intangible since Martha Bemis' visit of the month before. Brewster had felt a sub-conscious sense of having been called to order by that event.

"Also," continued Ruth, "it is necessary for you to come to-night because Jane has cooked scalloped oysters. She sent word she expected you, too."

"I'll come," he said.

She rose to go.

"Can't I—can't I talk to you a minute about what you said a while ago you would like to know about—what to read? You said if I would mention books you would like to read systematically."

Ruth again took her chair. "Why, yes, I *would* like to know—only—perhaps it would bother your head?"

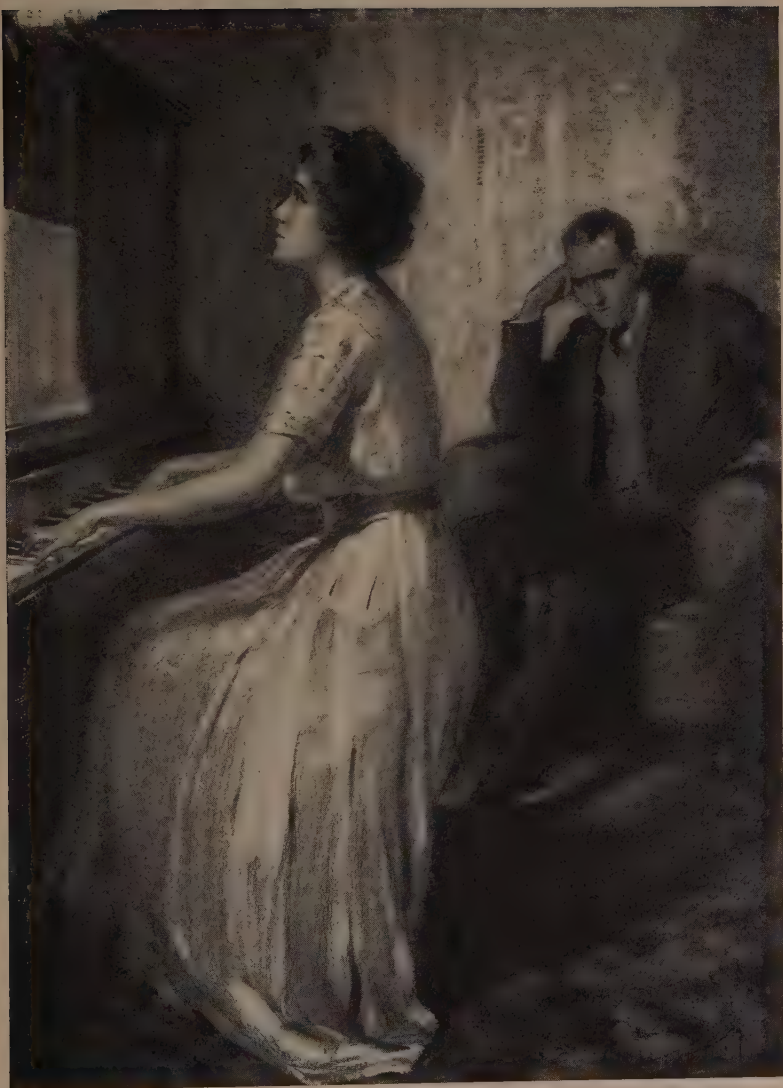
"Not a bit," he assured her; "it's only the sight or thought of a particular printed page that hurts; I can wander over the field easily enough." He went to his aunt's little old desk, got a pad and pencil, and gave them to Ruth. He mentioned books by title, told her what they were respectively valuable for, and talked a half hour, during which her cheeks assumed an extraordinary scarlet flush under the mental stimulus. It was five minutes of six when she looked at Brewster's little clock.

"I must go." She rose hurriedly.

He followed her to the door. "You haven't called me Giles Brewster for a long while," he said, as she stepped out into the night.

"You're expected to supper in ten minutes, Giles Brewster," she called back, through the darkness.

After a delightful supper hour, Dr. Huntington was called away. As Mrs. Tremaine



"In silent enjoyment, watching her white fingers as they
caressed the keys"



and Percival were going to an entertainment in the town hall, Brewster and Ruth were presently alone. He asked her for music.

They went to the parlor, and Brewster lighted the piano lamp for her. He sat a very little back in the room, at one side, where he could perfectly observe her profile, as she played. She played reveries, nocturnes, a particularly dreamy waltz which was a favorite of Brewster's, and the incomparable Spring Song, which was a favorite of her own.

Still she played on, for the mood was upon her. She improvised, and Brewster rested in silent enjoyment, watching her white fingers as they caressed the keys; watching the changing shades of expression on her face.

It was nearly ten when she suddenly ceased playing, and turned to him: "I lost myself," she said; "sometimes I forget."

Brewster rose from his chair, and came beside her, and took her hand. "I can't thank you enough—it has been a perfect evening.

You have given me a great deal of pleasure; I wish I could do as much for you."

"Oh, you do!" she answered quickly. Her face was flushed again. The soul of her was in her eyes. Brewster's own tired eyes saw it there. They passed into the front hall, beneath the hanging lamp.

"Good-night, Ruth."

"Good-night," she answered.

He thought of her face, when his eyes were closed, before he slept, and began to repeat:

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore——"

Suddenly, there was a great wonderment in his soul.

CHAPTER XVII

IT WAS early afternoon of a warm, perfect Indian summer day, with hazy blue in the sky, and a final sweetness and calm and soft light everywhere, before the New England winter should possess the country with its merciless grip, its dull cold, and icy blasts.

Ruth Huntington sat on their front porch. Dr. Huntington was coming out of his driveway, and Brewster sat in the carriage beside him, having been invited to take a ride "over the hills," five miles away, where a man lay sick.

There was an advancing cloud of dust down the road, a sudden, increasing whirl, an oncoming apparition that terrified Dr. Huntington's horse; it reared and plunged; the carriage was now almost out of the driveway, upon the highway; Brewster stood up and waved his arms frantically, and shouted to the persons in the automobile to slacken speed.

On they came.

Dr. Huntington had pulled his mare almost straight into the air with his strong arm; but a rein broke; as the auto flew by her head she gave a wild leap across the highway and upon the green. The carriage struck a tree with a crash, freeing the horse. Brewster and Dr. Huntington were thrown violently. Brewster rose from the turf hardly a second after he had landed; Dr. Huntington lay on the green beside an iron hydrant. There was a wound on his temple where he had struck the hydrant. Brewster raised him; Ruth Huntington, with blanched face, was beside him. It had all happened in a few seconds. The automobile, making for the turnpike road to Mixville, was not yet out of sight.

"My father!" said Ruth; it was neither a cry nor a moan; but she saw his head—and understood.

"We must get him to the office!" said Brewster, half carrying, half dragging the burden.

"Don't!" she cried; "let me hold his head!"

She knelt on the green and there he died. The last faint breath had gone before a half dozen persons had gathered.

Brewster led Ruth to the house—she leaned upon him so that he fairly carried her up the front steps; she was a dead weight in his arms as he laid her on a couch in the parlor. He lowered her head; consciousness returned. “My father!” she repeated. Not realizing what he did, knowing only that the anguish in his heart at her grief bade him comfort her, Giles Brewster bent over and caressed her again and again; and yet again. She raised herself from the couch, and he folded her, unresisting, in his arms.

In the weeks that followed her father’s death Ruth Huntington was soul-riven. She had given a silent, deep love to her father. They had understood one another perfectly. She was blood of his blood and heart of his heart. She had known that always. So kin were their natures that often she had looked

to him for guidance and received it without the passing of a word between them. Her silent anguish had endured for days before tears came. And even then she was none the less stricken. Instinctively she sought the strongest support she could find. She found it in Giles Brewster. He gave her all of his compassion, his sympathy—and—his love. Yes, he knew it now. He had never known or conceived or dreamed of anything like it. He was honest with himself. He was just in his consideration of Martha Bemis. He thought of her even tenderly; honor demanded that he should fulfill the obligation which he had incurred. He would fulfill it to the letter. Meantime, there could be nothing but honor in friendship with such a woman as Ruth Huntington. She gave herself to that friendship with perfect trust; she should never know that he craved more than might ever be his.

The snows of winter came. The days would soon be the shortest of the year. Brewster

lived doggedly on from day to day in the midst of a greater happiness and a deeper woe than life had ever given to him.

"Life," he said bitterly; "life is the dross of Circumstance." That was when he was alone, on his stripped wood lot, where the bare timber was stacked up. The men had finished and gone. His eyes burned in the cutting wind; he believed they were worse than they had been at any time.

"My God!" he cried out in the agony of his spirit under the dull wintry sky, "is my life to end like the ending of this wood lot? Can't I get well—can't I work—can't I come ever again into my own? Am I stripped of everything living, in life?"

The thought of Ruth Huntington and the beautiful friendship she gave him because he tried to comfort her came to him, and his heart was less like a stone.

That night he went over from his cottage, as was quite his custom now. For the first time since her father's death she

played to him a little; not at his request, but because she saw he was tired, troubled, worn. She was so far from selfish, this woman.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INDIVIDUAL thus far unknown to this little history of human lives must be presented in the person of Mr. Richard Spigg, a grocer, of Providence, Rhode Island. It may be accepted as a determined fact that a grocer, prosperous, young, and possessed of sturdy physique, and a fine, flourishing blond Van Dyke beard is an ornament to his community and an object of interest. Particularly is this true when, as in the case of Mr. Spigg, a happy succession of incidents leads to a state of religious exaltation eventuating in actual conversion to the church.

Through a most fortunate friendship for the bridegroom, it chanced that Mr. Richard Spigg acted as best man at the pretty home wedding of Martha Bemis' younger sister, Nellie. The Sunday following Mr. Spigg attended morning service at the church where Martha worshipped. Soon after he had been seated he saw, to his

pleasure, that Martha had observed him and was favoring him with a smile. His eyes were upon her, in her seat two rows ahead and across the aisle to the left of him, until the benediction. After church he walked home with her. That week Tuesday revival meetings began in Martha's church. Mr. Spigg attended. Martha was there, a fervent, rosy-cheeked, radiant worker, winsome as a veritable angel. In no long time Mr. Spigg was converted. Each night after meeting he and Martha walked home together, their route lying in the same direction.

Mr. Spigg was inducted into church and Sunday-school, where he became on terms of hearty good fellowship with the parents of Miss Bemis. Martha's father soon chanced to ascertain that Mr. Spigg was not only a grocer, but a prosperous grocer, who ran four teams and owned his own store. The young man was not denied when he requested the honor of being allowed to call at the Bemis residence.

In a commendably short space of time Mr.

Spigg evinced many signs of being in love with the only remaining daughter of the household. But it was understood that Martha was engaged to be married. Mr. Spigg made anxious inquiry of her father.

“ ‘E’s a chap that’s ’ad ’is ’ealth busted up, an’ left the city, an’ left ’er, too, a-hangin’ on ferlorn ’opes,” said Martha’s parent. “You go in, an’ may the right man win ’er; ’e ain’t ’ere now.”

Stated briefly, Richard Spigg “went in.” Martha became, in spite of herself, the recipient of attentions vastly more elaborate than she had received from any admirer she ever had.

There were Y. M. C. A. entertainments and banjo concerts; there was a jolly sleigh ride up to Attleboro, with Mr. Spigg and a merry party of choice spirits. There was a grand three nights’ fair, under the auspices of the fraternal organization to which Mr. Spigg belonged. Finally, there were fancy groceries from Mr. Spigg’s excellent store.

Mr. and Mrs. Bemis were deeply interested in the complexity of the situation. They discussed it much in the privacy of their chamber. They could not understand Martha's aloofness. For she was by no means always as gracious as she might have been. To Martha's parents there was nothing but sweet reason in their desires, their motives or their conduct. To Martha herself, Richard Spigg, representing the Material, was a definite, tangible, non-negligible quantity. Yet she was not prepared to consider him in all seriousness; she was willing to enjoy the pleasures which his admiration assured her, but she did not propose to forget the man to whom she was engaged to be married. Marriage meant a great deal to Martha.

Soon after the middle of December Giles Brewster visited Willston, the oculist, at Hartford. He found, as he had feared, that his eyes were not better. Upon completing the examination Willston gave him little encouragement for any early improvement. He told him

that another six months would now be a comparatively short time in which to note a change for the better. Brewster decided to come from Hartford direct to Providence to acquaint his *fiancée* with the unwelcome news. He chanced to reach the Bemis residence at the supper hour, when the family were enjoying table delicacies which had been proffered by Mr. Richard Spigg, the grocer. Indeed, Mr. Spigg himself made one of the family party, as frequently happened on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, when the store closed early. It was an entirely informal occasion which the gentlemen were freely enjoying in their shirt sleeves, as a hot fire superheated the small dining-room. Martha's father went coatless to the front door when the bell rang. Mr. Bemis was unable to conceal the deep and instant depression which seized him at sight of Brewster. Brewster could not but feel that the moment was sad before Mr. Bemis had uttered a syllable. With as few of these as possible Mr. Bemis seated Brewster in the parlor. Mr.

Bemis lighted a single gas jet and turned it low, and departed. Bright warmth was in the dining-room beyond, and Brewster heard Martha's voice in laughter, and a jovial masculine voice. The audible merriment ceased when Martha's father had spoken a few words to the company. Evidently the meal was soon finished, without thought of asking Brewster to partake. From time to time he faintly heard through the closed doors the erstwhile jovial masculine voice.

Presently Martha threw open the folding doors between dining-room and parlor and stood revealed to Brewster. She came forward. Mr. and Mrs. Bemis were not visible. Brewster greeted Martha and kissed her. She expressed much surprise at his presence.

Briefly, but sparing himself not at all, he told her why he had come. Told her that the oculist found his eyes no better, so far as the possibility of working with them was concerned, and doubted if they would improve appreciably for another six months.

Martha's surprise at seeing Brewster was so hastily displaced by her grievous disappointment at his condition that when Martha's mother entered the room Brewster began to feel as though the evening were a kaleidoscopic tragedy. Martha's father, now wearing a coat, and having a pipe in his patriarchal, bearded countenance, also entered; Martha stated, at once, without reservation, the sad news in regard to Brewster's eyes. In the impressive silence which followed Brewster thought of the Dead Lost at Sea; here was a gloom surpassing. Martha's parents withdrew in the midst thereof, quite too overcome even to commiserate Brewster on his fate. Mr. Bemis puffed on his pipe so violently at the moment he passed out into the kitchen that as he closed the door it caught a cloud of smoke and sent it whirling picturesquely back into the little dining-room.

Brewster remembered with what joyous *élan* he had once been received in that humble abode.

From the kitchen the voices of Mr. Bemis

and another man, presumably the guest who had been merry at table, occasionally reached Brewster's ears as he did his poor best to console Martha Bemis.

"Oh, Giles, how could I bear it? Half a year—and then you'll be put off again; we've been engaged over a year and a half now. Two years waiting and then—did the man say your eyes would be all well then?"

"No; he didn't promise anything."

"Then what should we gain by waiting?"

"Nothing, perhaps; do you want to marry me now?"

"Why, we couldn't! It's absurd for you to think of such a thing." Her last sentence was sharp.

"I only asked you."

They were silent.

"Would you like to feel free—released from your engagement, until—I am well—or worse?"

She brightened and looked at him long, almost affectionately. Her eyes as nearly

glowed as blue eyes can. She breathed a deep sigh.

"Giles," she said, "such a step ought not to be taken without considering—without considering *carefully*." She paused a deliberate second. "No, I shall not say that I give up our engagement."

She kissed him. A wave of regret, tenderness, pain, swept over him.

"As you will, Martha," he said gently. And so it was left between them. At best, his own life held for him no promise of a future such as he might, but for a mistaken past, have been free to dream of. Words were futile.

He bade her good-night early, being supperless and tired. Good-night was good-by, for teamsters were to begin drawing his lumber from the wood lot to South Tolltown Depot on the morrow, and Brewster must return by the first train in the morning. That good-night and good-by was a perfectly calm leave-taking. Martha had accepted the inevitable in a practical, sensible way.

CHAPTER XIX

ONE evening not long after Brewster's brief visit to Providence Mr. Richard Spigg sat in the brilliantly lighted parlor of the Bemis residence. If Mr. Spigg had chosen to employ his mental powers to formulate a reason for the brilliance of the Bemis parlor, he would have declared that mere gas afforded little of it. Miss Martha Bemis was smiling. Mr. Spigg sat at no great distance from Martha, directly beneath the crayon portrait of Martha's male parent. A crayon portrait of Martha's mother was diagonally opposite, in the same corner of the room. Beneath this ample likeness Martha reclined in an easy chair, cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling.

"I've been comin' here a good deal lately," said Mr. Spigg.

"Well?" questioned Martha.

Mr. Spigg hitched his chair closer, and breathed heavily.

"Martha, I did a great day's business to-day."

"I'm glad to know that!"

"Are you, though?" Mr. Spigg spoke with pleased conviction, albeit a little wonderingly.

"Why, certainly I'm glad. Don't I like to see my friends prosperous?"

Mr. Spigg grinned. "Well, I did business to the tune of \$235.75 to-day, not countin' bakery business."

Martha waited.

Mr. Spigg resumed: "I guess there ain't many independent grocers in the city outside of the com-bine doin' better."

"I s'pose there's a great deal of profit in groceries," said Miss Bemis.

Mr. Spigg crossed his legs handsomely. "Yes, when a man knows how, he can make a good thing—a bang up good thing!"

Again there was a pause. Not at all an awkward one, but an opportunity for mental processes to go on. Mr. Spigg spoke again:

"A man that's cleanin' up two hundred 'n' fifty profit his poorest months ain't doin' bad, considerin' the business is growin'."

Martha felt as though a great wave were sweeping toward her. The imminence of Fate made her shiver for a moment; another instant and she seemed to see clearly beyond and to be ready.

Mr. Spigg came closer yet. "Martha—hang it all, Martha, everything I got's yours! Martha, I want you to marry me— Say, Martha, what d'you say?"

Martha's head drooped; she leaned forward, and the wealth of her tawny hair sent forth its fragrance as it came nearer, nearer, to the man who, in another second, caught her in his arms and drew her to him.

"Yes, say yes, Martha!" he hoarsely cried.

"Yes," she murmured.

The hour of Mr. Richard Spigg's departure from the Bemis residence that night was characterized especially by lateness. Martha's parents had long been deeply asleep. Mr. Bemis

was snoring steadily when Martha pushed open the door of her parents' bedroom. The family dining-room was dark, and Martha had lighted a snap match as she stood at the bedroom door. Its crackle and blaze instantly aroused her mother to alertness.

"What is it, Martha?"

Martha stepped within and lighted a single gas jet by her mother's bureau before replying. She enjoyed being deliberative on this occasion. She had been considerably reproached by her parents recently for being engaged to a worthless fellow who had neither business, money, nor prospects. Martha's father, particularly, had been entirely out of patience with her. When the gas flared he grunted and ceased snoring. Martha spoke:

"I'm going to marry Mr. Spigg," she said.

"Tom! Tom! Wake up! Wake up!" cried Mrs. Bemis to her lord and master. "Wake up, Tom! Martha's a-goin' t' marry Spigg the grocer!"

Mr. Bemis sat up in bed. They were both

sitting up now. Martha surveyed them calmly. Mr. Bemis rubbed his eyes.

"I tell you our Martha's goin' t' marry Spigg!" cried Mrs. Bemis.

Mr. Bemis comprehended. "Martha," he said, "you done well. You done noble. I could only a wished you'd a done hit sooner." Having delivered himself thus, Mr. Bemis arose from his couch, found his pipe on the bureau, lighted it, and smoked meditatively while he paced slowly up and down the bedroom with a bedquilt wrapped about him, and clinging closely to his legs. It was chilly, however, and he soon got into bed again. Martha had approached her mother's pillow and received a hearty smack and the maternal blessing. Her father now reached over and patted her fondly. "You won't never regret bein' wise, Marthy, an' Spigg's a good match," he said.

"Good-night, father," said Martha in a dutiful tone; "good-night, maw." She rose from her knees and left them, turning out the gas as she passed the jet and stepped from the room.



"Mr. Bemis smoked meditatively"



She quickly found her way to her own room at the top of the house, and there, flushed, but still deliberative, she sat at the little table that held the photograph of Giles Brewster and wrote this letter:

“DEAR MR. BREWSTER: I have considered carefully of late the matter of our engagement. My parents had objections to its being continued with such unpromising circumstances when we could *not* be married. They appreciated in the highest terms your kind offer to release me, which I spoke to them about, and deemed it wise. Of late, also, Mr. Richard Spigg, a gentleman who is a member of our Church, asked me to marry him, and he, being a business man and in a position to marry, was anxious to do so at once, which I have thought best to accept.

“Yours truly,
“MARTHA BEMIS.”

Having carefully read her letter, Martha Bemis remarked softly to herself, “I’ll date it when I get ready to send it, and I won’t send it till I’m ready to be married.”

Then she enclosed it in an envelope, placed the envelope in her bureau drawer, and undressed. Just before she turned out the gas she looked at the photograph of Giles Brewster. She said her prayers in bed—and slept well. Reversion to type is a curious thing. When it occurs it is quite as absolute as it is astonishing.

CHAPTER XX

EVER since Ruth Huntington had declined the honor of being his wife Charles Edwards had fostered a growing resentment against Brewster. As the months had gone on, Brewster had been so constant a visitor at the Huntington home that it seemed to Edwards that he had quite possibly supplanted him in the favor of Ruth. He was all the more suspicious, all the more wrathful, because he knew nothing—and was not in a position to know. He even grew envious of Brewster's success on his wood lot. There was a goodly sum of money to be realized; Brewster had managed his affairs capably.

Edwards' unhappy temper was finally fired to the last degree by a bit of irresponsible gossip conceived and circulated by Mrs. Henry Bishop to the effect that Brewster had visited Providence, had broken his engagement to Martha Bemis, and was now secretly engaged to be married to Ruth Huntington.

Edwards could not longer refrain from doing anything which lay in his power to injure his rival—his enemy. He wrathfully planned Brewster's discomfiture.

One Saturday noon hour early in January, when the teamsters were eating their frozen dinners, and Brewster was at South Tolltown Depot arranging for his next week's shipments, Edwards appeared on Brewster's wood lot, gathered the teamsters about him, and announced that he wished them all to go to work for him on a big wood lot owned by the Lumber Company the following Monday morning. "I've got thirty more lots to come, boys, and I guess you can afford to work for me when I say so!" Edwards controlled the situation. His favor meant bread and butter to the men with teams. They quit work that Saturday night, though manfully appointing a spokesman to tell Brewster why. There was no redress. He had only hired the men by the week. He went to his cottage despondently enough and spent a nearly sleepless night, considering what he

should do. In the morning, Sunday, he decided first to visit his wood lot and estimate the amount of lumber to be drawn, and then to go to see Benjamin Gilbert and take counsel.

It chanced that Charles Edwards was moved to visit Brewster's wood lot that Sunday morning. A mean curiosity possessed him to view the piles of lumber and closely estimate the amount of money he was tying up for Brewster. He went crunching through the snow and circled several big piles of hard lumber at the lower side of the stripped lot.

As he came around the corner of the last stack of lumber, the tall form of Brewster, clad in a heavy sweater and wearing boots with trousers tucked in at the top, stood before him. The bright sunshine glinted on the snow.

"Well?" rang out Brewster's voice in a tone of sudden, definite inquiry.

Edwards was disconcerted. He stared at the professor, who said not another word, but was waiting.

"I came to look over the mill!" he blurted

out. "I—I shall have it moved!" The mill gang had been through for weeks. The Lumber Company had two other mills in operation. The one on Brewster's lot had been left there only because it was not yet wanted. Brewster smiled grimly. "I don't believe that's what you came up here for at all," he said incisively—"anyway, it's at the other end of the lot and you know it perfectly well. You can move it as soon as you please!" Brewster's tone irritated Edwards. The situation irritated him. He was caught spying, and he knew it.

"Do you think you have treated me fairly about the teamsters?" asked Brewster sharply; "don't you think you might have given me decent notice?"

"What's it any of your business what I do?" Edwards' voice was pitched in anger.

Brewster stepped forward, came to within three feet of Edwards. "See here, Edwards, you've done a mean trick. You know you have!" It was a challenge. Brewster's tone, his attitude, his certainty, stung the other man

to the quick. All the rancor that had been growing within him for months surged in his breast. Instinctively Edwards drew off his overcoat and threw it into the snow. He squared his shoulders; his red face grew fiery, his hands clenched. "It's none of your business what I do, you four-eyed fool!"

Brewster took off his gloves, removed his glasses, placed them within a glove, tossed the gloves upon a snow-covered stump, and looked into Edwards' face in utter scorn. "You brute!" he said.

There could be but one answer. The fellow's brute instincts possessed him; he sprang at Brewster with a snarl. The men grappled; Brewster caught the onslaught fairly; they swayed and struggled and trampled the snow. Brewster gained a quick new hold, bent Edwards slowly back, till he writhed in agony. A big elbow was on his chest, the hold about his neck was merciless—Brewster suddenly released him with a jerk and pitched him headlong sprawling into the snow. Edwards

struggled to his feet, his breath coming in furious gasps, and, without reason or caution, madly rushed upon his adversary, lunging forward and swinging a vicious blow at his face. Brewster was a boxer. He parried the foolish blow like lightning and sent one to Edwards' jaw that shook every fiber of his being; yet he was sturdy; he tottered back, but came again. Brewster ended it—he caught him squarely on the chin with as neat a blow as was ever sent home. Edwards dropped. Brewster stood over him. It was a half minute before Edwards groaned, rolled over, staggered to his feet. "Had enough?" said Brewster.

"Well, well, WELL!" sounded a big, cheerful voice. Edwards, still dazed, weakly turned. Brewster's gaze now rested on the form of Benjamin Gilbert, who had come between two piles of lumber and appeared to have taken in the affair. The big man's face lighted with a whole-souled smile. "Charlie," he said, "I should advise you to get off Brewster's property whilst you c'n walk."



“With as neat a blow as was ever sent home”



"Hang you—I'll—" But Edwards got no further.

"Get!" said Brewster.

"That last one kinder shook ye' up, didn't it, Charlie?" said Benjamin Gilbert. Edwards backed away from Brewster, picked up his overcoat from the snow and started with heavy, hasty strides to the nearest cart path. Brewster stood watching; his capable arms by his side; good, clear color was in his face.

"Brewster, you're lookin' fine this mornin'—feelin' well?" Benjamin Gilbert's voice was hearty.

Brewster's face relaxed. "I'm satisfied," he said.

"So be I!" said the big man. "Durn it, Brewster, it was handsome!" He came up and laid his hand on Brewster's shoulder. "My boy, tell me all about it!"

"I was here, and he came, and we had words about his taking off my teamsters last night—you knew about that?"

"Yes. Land, yes! It's all over the village.

I came up to your place to inquire about it from you direct this mornin' an' I knew you was probably up here when you wasn't to home—so I walked up. Now let's go on back—you spend th' day with me, an' we'll discuss this whole matter. It's a durn shame, Brewster. I expect he's jealous an' mad 'cause you an' Ruth Huntington air good friends—folks say she give him th' mitten—he's ben grouty ever since! Now let's go back t' th' village, Brewster—you've done your whole duty by Edwards!" A broad smile spread over Benjamin Gilbert's face. Brewster picked up his gloves, and they started on.

"I expect," said Benjamin Gilbert, "Edwards thinks he can tie you up and keep you from marketin' your lumber and bother you a whole lot. But you can let the lumber stay where 'tis till spring. When spring comes, you can let a contract to some out-of-town man to put on teams and draw the whole business."

Brewster smiled. "Oh, I shall live. It's a petty trick, that's all."

"I s'pose you've laid out some money first and last on that wood lot. I hope you ain't in an uncomfortable situation, air you, Brewster?"

"I've got ready money enough left to live this winter on; but I'll have to market that lumber in the spring or mortgage my aunt's cottage."

"I guess there won't be any mortgagin' necessary—we'll see. Don't worry until to-morrow."

They went direct to Benjamin Gilbert's cottage, and there, in an atmosphere of wood-fire warmth and hospitable good cheer, he spent the wintry day. For dinner they had bacon and eggs and coffee as the host knew how to make it; and then cigars. "There air times," remarked Benjamin Gilbert, "when a cigar is full as consolin' as a sermon. Sometimes fightin' is necessary an' beautiful," he added musingly.

The afternoon passed like a reverie. At six they had supper of honey and hot corn bread.

"Well, Brewster," said the big man, as he

stepped out upon his piazza with him that evening when Brewster was going, "there's considerable many stars up in th' sky, but I guess Charles Edwards saw 'em all this mornin'!"

"You don't think he's likely to talk about the affair, do you? There's gossip enough already. I hope he'll keep it to himself. I wouldn't like to have Ruth Huntington's name dragged into this——"

Benjamin Gilbert laid his hand on Brewster's shoulder. "Don't worry, Brewster; Charlie Edwards ain't goin' t' advertise this mornin's festivities!"

CHAPTER XXI

“I’VE made up my mind since last night,” said Benjamin Gilbert as he sat in Brewster’s dining-room at ten o’clock the next forenoon, “that you can do something for me, and that you’re the man I want to do it. The grist mill’s on my hands again. ’Tain’t any use trustin’ Abial Jenks to run it. He’s one more man that’s found business interferin’ with Rum and nobly decided not to let it. He ain’t ben over to the mill since last Wednesday. This time I’m through with him for good, and what I want to say is this: you come down to my mill and be me. I’ve fixed for Jeb Simmons to open up the mill every mornin’ and look after grain and grindin’ and water gate, same’s he used to when he worked for me before, and same’s he’s capable of. There’s got to be one man on hand with brains enough to supply Jeb. I’m askin’ you t’ come to my mill durin’ the winter and look after things. What do you say?”

"If I can be of any use to you, use me. I'll be glad of the chance to be busy," Brewster answered, quickly enough.

"It'll be good for you and better for me," said Benjamin Gilbert. "You come to the mill mornin's when you get your own chores done up; you have dinner with me noons and then take another look in at Jeb Simmons in the afternoon. We'll get business to payin' inside of a month. 'Bial Jenks got so unreliable regular trade went off over to Will's Corners some, but it'll come back if you and I can keep partly sober part of the time. I can't go into the mill for a minute, the dust wheezes me up so, but I can tell you everything you need to know to run the business yourself. There won't be any figurin' but what you can do in your head, and no accounts."

"I'll be glad of the chance," Brewster repeated.

Details were arranged in the course of the day, Brewster going to Benjamin Gilbert's in the afternoon, and down to the mill, where he

engaged in close consultation with the amiable Jeb Simmons. Jeb's brain was not masterful. The head which surmounted his lank body ran to peak rather than dome. His beardless face was very thin and his bony hands exceedingly large. They had gripped meal sacks for many years. Jeb's normal expression of countenance was smiling. The only variation was a bland, puzzled look. Brewster returned from the mill satisfied that with his own power of initiative and Jeb Simmons' large hands, and Benjamin Gilbert to direct at a distance, the mill could be run successfully. Benjamin Gilbert insisted on his having supper with him, and they talked an hour afterward.

Brewster went up street to Randall's store without stopping at his cottage. At the post-office he found a letter and took it home to read by the light of his big lamp.

The letter had been remailed.

The original address was typewritten, and read, "Prof. Giles Brewster, Brown University, Providence, R. I." The Registrar at

the University had crossed out the "Brown University, Providence, R. I.," and written "Tolltown, Conn.," in the lower left-hand corner.

Brewster studied the original post mark, being puzzled as to the probable source of this typewritten missive. He made it out: "Ash-tabula, Ohio." He tore open the envelope. The letter within was clearly typewritten. It ran, as he read without much difficulty:

"PROFESSOR GILES BREWSTER, BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R. I.

"DEAR SIR: Acting upon instructions given to me by your late uncle, James A. Winthrop, of this town, recently deceased, who in his last illness placed the matter of his estate in my hands, I have to inform you that you appear to be the only heir to said estate. This consists mainly of real estate in this town, approximately valued at \$50000. These figures are based on assessed valuations.

"I am writing you somewhat urgently at this time as I have a purchaser, if you care to dispose of the property. Perhaps it would be

more satisfactory to yourself, in view of the fact that there are also many personal belongings, to come here in person and make your own disposition of the estate. Yet if you care to entrust the matter to my hands, I shall be pleased to safeguard your interests.

"Trusting that you will honor me with an early reply stating whether you choose to come here or to have me hold, sell or otherwise act in regard to your late uncle's estate,

"Very truly yours,

"A. O. WHITE, Att'y-at-Law."

Brewster gasped. Blood stood cold at his heart, then mounted in a frenzy to his temples. His eyes swam. He read again, in a daze. The figures danced before him—\$50000!

He repeated the words, "Fifty Thousand Dollars!"

James A. Winthrop—his mother's only brother, by turns a recluse and a wanderer. Always an eccentric, Brewster had never seen him except at his mother's funeral, when, by the merest chance, his address had been known.

Thereafter he had promptly disappeared, and in the years that had passed Brewster had come to suppose he was dead. There had not been a word from him in a decade, and he was an old man at its beginning. "Fifty Thousand Dollars!" This was what he had been doing these years—getting fifty thousand dollars! And evidently he had kept track of Brewster, and not forgotten his blood.

The dry letter of that lawyer was tremendous. Brewster smoothed it with hands that began to tremble, as he lost the tensivity of the first shock of surprise. Real estate approximately valued at fifty thousand dollars. Brewster's life was again his own! Money was independence. He would go, claim what was his, settle the estate. It was preposterous that this lawyer should have suggested the possibility of settlement without his presence!

First thoughts had fled through Brewster's brain with the rapidity of lightning. They had crowded one upon another in sharp succession. Now he rose to his feet, lifted by an emotion

so mighty it had needed a minute to possess him while lesser emotions were fleeting.

“Ruth!” he cried; “Ruth Huntington!”

Another moment, and he sank into his chair. He bowed his head and he buried his face in his hands. “Martha,” he said; and the tears ran between his fingers.

His life in Tolltown Street was done. His friendship with Ruth Huntington must be only a memory. There was but one course. To fail to marry Martha Bemis after her faithful waiting was unthinkable. His path lay as clear before him as though all the light in God’s world streamed upon it.

CHAPTER XXII

BREWSTER was up with the wintry dawn. He had scarcely slept. The wind howled fiercely. He looked out of doors and perceived that a snowstorm was beginning. The first flakes eddied and whirled. Brewster made coffee, ate a cracker and went to his bedroom. Here he laid out his best clothes, after which he drew on his big brown sweater and went down the road in the fast increasing storm to Benjamin Gilbert's. He found him starting his fire.

"You air early," said Benjamin Gilbert.

"I have something important to tell you. I've had a letter that I've just inherited an estate of fifty thousand dollars from my mother's brother. I thought he died years ago!"

The stove cover dropped from Benjamin Gilbert's hand, and he stared at Brewster.

"Lord! Good Lord!" he roared, "what—

what kind of a thing is this—I never heard—good Lord! To come down here with news like this before breakfast!”

For a second the two men faced each other in silence. Then Benjamin Gilbert grasped Brewster’s hand powerfully. “My boy,” he said, “tell me all about it.”

“I’ve inherited fifty thousand dollars in Western real estate,” said Brewster, “and the whole story is in this letter.” He drew from his pocket the lawyer’s letter and handed it to Benjamin Gilbert. The big man dropped into a chair and read it. He seemed puzzled. It was difficult to comprehend, all at once. He began to repeat the sentence, “mainly of real estate in this town valued at—fifty thousand dollars?” he asked in amazement, raising his eyes from the letter and looking sharply at Brewster.

Brewster repeated the words, “fifty thousand dollars.” To him they were becoming familiar. For a moment longer Benjamin Gilbert continued to look sharply at Brewster.

Then he again scrutinized the letter closely. After this he was silent for a full minute.

"Brewster," he said gently, "I suppose the next person that'll peruse this astonishin' letter'll be Miss Martha Bemis?"

"Yes," said Brewster.

"You air goin' to take it to her t' read, to brighten her eyes and lighten her heart, and I suppose that it might mean that we folks here in Tolltown have got to say good-by to you before very long?"

Brewster smiled assent—a rather odd smile, and sad, if one had noticed. Quickly he made answer: "I'm afraid you'll have to get a better man than I am to run your grist mill."

"Never mind that," said Benjamin Gilbert absently. For a moment he was silent.

Brewster sat down in a chair. He had been standing since he entered the house.

"I presume," suggested Benjamin Gilbert, "that you ain't goin' to specially spread th' news in Tolltown about this matter to anybody else—except, maybe——"

"I shall tell nobody," said Brewster, "except—" he hesitated.

"Except Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert, without hesitancy.

"Ruth," repeated Brewster; "you and she are the best friends I have in Tolltown."

"It's perfectly proper, if you desire, to inform Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert. "*She* never tells anything to the curious. When you air *ready*, get out a sworn statement and send a copy to Mis' Henry Bishop. The day you do it she'll have it all over town before night that you stole the money."

Brewster laughed.

"Mr. Gilbert," he said, after a moment's silence, "of course you see this money coming to me naturally means that I am in a position to fulfill the obligation of my long deferred engagement to be married. Fifty thousand dollars means to me a degree of independence that would not have come for some years, even with perfect eyesight and health. But now," he went on abruptly, "I want you to advise me.

Won't you read that letter again and tell me if you don't believe it's tricky—what do you think of that lawyer calmly offering to sell fifty thousand dollars' worth of real estate sight unseen to me? Of course I've got to go out there. It may be worth seventy-five thousand for all we know."

The old man looked the letter through and thought for a moment. "I've got to mull this over—this whole situation," he said at length. "I s'pose you're goin' t' see Miss Bemis soon?"

"To-day."

"You'll be back to Tolltown again before you'd think of goin' West?"

"Oh, yes."

"I shall be thinkin'," said Benjamin Gilbert; "and probably when you show that letter to Miss Bemis *she'll* have some suggestions." He handed the lawyer's letter to Brewster, who took it and arose.

"I shall say good-by for a few days—till I see you again at least. I'm going to Providence this afternoon."

The men were at the door. "Brewster, good-by! And remember you've got friends in Tolltown Street that don't care whether you've got fifty thousand dollars or fifty thousand cents, so fur as feelin' friendly to you! Remember that, will you?" Benjamin Gilbert had Brewster's hand and was looking him earnestly in the face.

"Always," said Brewster.

He went out into the storm and up the road. Ruth Huntington answered Brewster's ring at the front door. She asked him into the parlor, a smile on her lips and something of inquiry in her face, because of his manner.

She listened to his quickly told story wide-eyed, flushed. The tenseness of Ruth Huntington's emotion was tempered by such a sweetness as he had not before seen, even in her.

When he had done he waited for her to speak.

"Oh, Giles Brewster!" she said, "I'm so glad for you!" She came to him and gave him her hand. He clasped it tenderly and slightly bowed his head. For a moment they stood there.

"I'm going away to-day," he said after a little; "I'm going to Providence."

"Yes," she said simply. Her clear eyes looked into his.

"But," he added, gaining the firmness he wanted, "I'm coming back—it isn't good-bye for good. I shall see you again, of course."

"Of course," she repeated.

"I'll be back in a few days very likely," he said; "and meantime nobody knows this but you and Benjamin Gilbert."

"Thank you for the confidence."

They stood at the door.

"Good-by—for now."

"Good-by," she answered.

He was gone.

When Giles Brewster had ridden away through the snowstorm to Mixville that afternoon, Ruth Huntington went to Benjamin Gilbert's house.

"Ruth," said Benjamin Gilbert, as they discussed the news of the day, "Ruth, did Brewster show you that letter from the lawyer?"

"No."

"Just told you?"

"Yes."

"Oh," commented Benjamin Gilbert.

Presently he looked searchingly into her face: "Ruth."

"Yes."

"Brewster, he ain't a feller that strikes twelve th' first time."

"No."

"But he's a man."

"Yes."

"It takes a man t' be a man, in some situations, not knowin'——"

"Not knowing anything but honor," she said; "not even conceiving the possibility that——"

"That prosperity's got anything t' do with affections."

She was silent.

"Sometimes it ain't," said the big man; "sometimes it ain't."

CHAPTER XXIII

BREWSTER arrived at Providence a little after six o'clock. He had supper, and immediately afterward went to the house of Martha Bemis. His ring was answered by Mr. Bemis, who came to the door in his shirt sleeves. If Mr. Bemis had been merely depressed when he found Giles Brewster at the door of his residence on the occasion of Brewster's last visit there, he was now overwhelmed. His countenance expressed indignant grief. Possibly he would have forgotten to ask Brewster to step in out of the cold, but he heard footsteps, and Martha appeared in the hallway. He turned to her. "You can settle with 'im," he announced shortly, with a gesture.

Mr. Bemis withdrew.

"Why—why Giles."

Inquiry was written on his face no less than on hers.

"I have come—to see you."

She bethought herself and asked him in. He followed her, as she led the way through the hall to the parlor.

If Mr. Richard Spigg had not that evening been at an important meeting of his Lodge, in all probability he would have been at the Bemis residence. Martha thanked her stars that he was absent, as she lighted a gas jet and considered what she would best say to Giles Brewster. She regretted that she had not mailed him the letter that lay ready for him in her top bureau drawer.

"Well, Martha, can't you say you're glad to see me—aren't you glad?" Brewster was nonplused by the girl's queerness of manner. She had turned from the gas jet and stood facing him. Her eyes were cast down.

"I—I'm afraid I'm not glad—just—now." She spoke very awkwardly. It was going to be disagreeable to tell him.

"Oh, Martha, have I—have I hurt you—is it because I haven't written—I meant——"

She seized the opportunity.

"You haven't written a word to me for two weeks," she said accusingly.

She looked at him as though he were a monster. Tears trembled beneath her eyelashes. Brewster's heart smote him.

"Oh, Martha," he cried, "your unhappy waiting days are over—I've come to tell you we can be married—for I'm going to have *fifty thousand dollars!*"

There was a moment of silence almost tragic. Then the understanding of Martha Bemis rose to the occasion.

"Say it! Tell me!" she cried; "tell me—fifty thousand dollars! Giles!—oh, Giles, you *Darling!*"

He soothed her for a brief moment. She clung to him fiercely; then betook herself from his arms almost furiously. Her ecstasy had possessed her; now curiosity flayed her.

"Tell me, Giles Brewster, of our fifty thousand dollars—it can't be true. Oh, it *is*—why don't you *talk?*"

Brewster stayed the whirlwind of her impetuosity.

"Yes, yes," he said.

He took a chair, and she threw herself ecstatically into his lap. He told her of their fortune as fast as her interruptions suffered him to do.

"Giles!" she said, when she had become more calm, "I want to see the letter that came like a fairy dream from that beautiful West to you and me!"

"Why, Martha," he said indulgently—he reached in his pocket for the letter. "No, I've left it in my suit case down at the depot parcel room. I'll bring it to-morrow, and I mustn't forget to bring it, for you must write for me to White, the attorney, to acknowledge it and to say that I am coming West to look after the property. I have an idea from this lawyer's letter it may be worth more than fifty thousand."

"Oh, *Giles!*" said the girl exultantly.

She clung to him.

"Giles!" she said, starting suddenly—"we haven't told papa and mamma!"

"You tell them," he said.

She kissed him and slipped from his knee. She was gone a scant five minutes. He faintly heard their mingled outcries of incredulity, approbation, joy.

Then they came in. Martha's father came in advance of her mother, overmastered by his enthusiasm. His hand was outstretched to Brewster.

"Hit's *grand!*" he shouted. "Hit's grand news you've brung us this night fer the 'appiness hof hour Marthy!"

Brewster took the hand and gave his other to Mrs. Bemis, who stood speechless by his side, with tears of joy coursing down her honest face.

Brewster left Martha at a comparatively early hour. He had slept almost none the night before; the stress of the many hours that had passed, each fraught with conflicting emotions more mighty than any he had ever known, had

taxed him severely. He sank quickly into the sleep of exhaustion at the downtown hotel where he took a room. His duty, so far as yet lay in his power, was done. The very last thought of all, before his tired brain gave up its ceaseless harrying, was a thought of another woman than Martha Bemis. He saw her picture as he would see it while he lived.

The counsels of the Bemis family lasted late that night. After much animated discussion, all of which tended toward the same end, it was unanimously felt that Divine Providence had interposed in the affairs of Martha Bemis to the perfectly apparent, necessary, and desirable discomfiture of one Richard Spigg. This fellow had almost gotten them into a pretty mess. To say nothing of the injustice that had so nearly been done to Giles Brewster. It would have been an unfair thing, a mean thing, a thing not now to be thought of, to play false so good a man as Giles Brewster merely because he was unfortunate. The sensitiveness

of Mr. Bemis in behalf of Giles Brewster was vastly increased.

As for Spigg, he better be sent about his business, which clearly was none of theirs. Mr. Bemis doubted not Martha would speedily find a way to settle 'im. She doubted it not, herself. But the thought of him vexed her all the same. Before she slept that night Martha considered many possible modes of getting rid of him as easily, and yet as effectively as she knew she must. Martha Bemis was an honest girl. She wished to play no man false. Her heart belonged to her first love. She knew it now. She winced a little, when she thought that Richard Spigg had ever caressed her. If he hadn't almost forced her, she would never have accepted his attentions—not to say his affections.

Fifty thousand dollars! The mind of Martha Bemis reverted to thoughts of marriage. At last she slept—almost as dreamlessly as her future husband.

“The sleep of the Just!” What a lie! What

a mockery, if it had that night been said of a wide-eyed girl who patiently waited for a cheerless dawn.

In Tolltown Street the snow had nearly turned to rain, and sleet flew against the window panes in fury.

CHAPTER XXIV

PREVIOUS to his conversion to the church Mr. Richard Spigg had been known to his lodge friends as "The Sporty Grocer." It must be said that as the day which had been set for his marriage with Miss Martha Bemis approached, Mr. Spigg found himself intent upon some pleasures of bachelorhood which he assured himself he would willingly forswear when he should reach the marriage state. Among these was the conviviality of Punch night at his lodge.

The spirits of his friends had run high, and when morning came Mr. Richard Spigg was still laboring under liquid excitation. When nine o'clock arrived, and his Doyle Avenue delivery team was ready to start out, Mr. Spigg drove it. He considered that he had recovered from the night before, except for a queer tendency on the part of his knees to give way when he tried to balance himself getting on and off

the delivery wagon. But he had not recovered. He deceived himself. The look of liquor was in his eye, and the odor of liquor was on his breath. He was a rash, over confident young man who was neither sophisticated nor sober.

When he reached the house where Martha Bemis lived he entered the gate with a bang, pirouetted along through the alley at the side of the house with noisy vehemence, closed the back door with a loud crash after he entered the house, and, hurling a market basket full of choice fancy groceries upon the kitchen table, made a quick and affectionate dash for Miss Bemis. She was equally quick and less affectionate. She escaped his kiss. But not his breath.

She glared at him. "How DARE you!" she cried.

Profound amazement was his. He sank weakly into a chair.

"You've been DRINKING!" she said. There was rage and fury (and relief) in her voice.

Mr. Spigg detected only rage and fury.

Martha's mother at this instant entered the kitchen.

"That man has been DRINKING!" said Martha, pointing at the unfortunate individual upon the chair. Mr. Spigg was breathing heavily. The keen nostrils of Mrs. Bemis caught the odor. She understood the opportunity.

She glared at him. She stamped her foot. It was a heavy foot. Mr. Spigg looked at his prospective mother-in-law in abject awe and grief.

"HOW DARE you?" she cried. This was what Martha had said. The effect was cumulative. His courage was gone utterly. He weakly arose. It was impossible to sit there with those two women glaring at him. "I—," he began, "I—I——"

"Leave my house this instant, and don't you ever dare to darken my doors again—you—you—DRUNKARD!"

It was Martha's mother who spoke. But he knew it might as well have been Martha. Richard Spigg departed from that house a sober

man. Two hours later he was not sober. He could not bear this grief unsustained.

Martha Bemis and her mother were inclined to ascribe all things to Divine Providence. The opportunity had certainly been provided, and Mr. Spigg had most assuredly been disposed of. Acting as agents of Divine Providence, they had done their part well.

The close blending of maidenly love and wifely solicitude in Martha when Giles Brewster came at two that afternoon was pretty to see. She was fond, as they had been fond in earlier days. She reminded him of that far-away time, and wantonly threw a mass of her hair in his face. Then she caught it up, and tossed it over her shoulders. It was flowing free to-day, because, once, when he had seen it so he had said it was beautiful. She reminded him of *that*, and laughed again. She was like a child. She gravely asked him about his eyes. He told her they were well enough to go on a wedding journey. She asked him how soon

that wedding journey could be. As soon as she had written for him to the lawyer in Ashtabula, Ohio, and received a satisfactory answer in regard to the immediate availability of the estate, he said. Then they would go on there to settle it, and that should be their wedding journey. Martha was ecstatic.

"Let me see that lawyer's lovely letter," she commanded. Brewster drew it from his pocket and gave it to her. She stepped to the window and stood there as she read.

She started. She cried out. Her hand suddenly went to her heart. She made a sound of anguish. Then she turned upon Brewster: "Oh, oh! What do you *mean*? This letter says your property is worth *five hundred dollars!*"

Brewster put out his arms to catch her as she half reeled toward him with the letter thrust accusingly at him.

"Don't touch me!" she cried; "you have broken my heart!"

Brewster took the letter. His face was

ghastly as he read and saw the trick his eyes had played upon him. There was a decimal, faint, but now discernible to him, between the first and last pair of ciphers. His property was approximately valued at \$500.00, not \$50000.

At four o'clock that afternoon Brewster was pacing back and forth on the icy walk beneath the window of his old room in Hope Dormitory, on the college campus. He had left Martha Bemis after as miserable and unavailing an hour as he remembered ever to have spent in his life. His pity for her woe was intense; the consequence of his mistake was heart rending.

His self-reproach was as bitter as the reproaches she cast upon him. He was a fool. He was quite convinced. In the flood of thoughts that rushed upon him as he walked there in the icy air beneath the bare, forsaken elms of winter, it suddenly dawned upon him that Benjamin Gilbert had read that letter,

and must have seen his absurd mistake. Why had he suffered it? Good God! Could Benjamin Gilbert have realized what such a mistake meant, or what kind of an experience he had been treated to in the hour just gone? Here was a problem for his racked, struggling brain. It was inexplicable.

Twilight began to come. In winter, shadows fall early upon the college campus. He stopped under the windows of his old room. He caught the low thrum of a guitar and the faintly borne echo of a song the fellows within were singing. Somebody opened the window wide, and a cloud of fragrant tobacco smoke settled down through the still air. They started another song. He began wearily pacing up and down again. Across the campus the city lights fell on the wan snow. Brewster watched a trolley car come up the hill. He passed out of the gate at the end of the dormitory, and crossed the street to the library. Entering, he found a secluded alcove.

The feeling that she had been wickedly imposed upon so rapidly grew upon Martha Bemis that she soon appeared to herself in the light of a victim of a dastardly swindle. She had told her mother, as soon as Brewster left the house. The consternation of Mrs. Bemis was tragic. When her father came home to supper she sullenly told him. He was at first stricken speechless; then he became more than mildly vituperative. His parental indignation at the heartless trick which had been played upon his daughter was frenzied and fine.

Mr. Bemis finally expressed the family consensus of opinion in these words: "HIT'S A HOUTRAGE!"

At about eight o'clock Giles Brewster came back to the house. Martha met him at the door with a silent anger so chilling that it would have taken more courage than it would have been worth while to expend to try for a moment to please or to comfort her. "I'm going away—I am going to leave the city," he said, as he stood in the hallway, "and I have only to hope

that when you think it over, you may feel more kindly toward me. I seem to have brought nothing but unhappiness to you. Yet neither fault nor intent has been mine. I ask you to forgive me. I shall do all I can for you, as soon as I can." He stood there beneath the rays of the flickering hall gas, so haggard, so white, so true, that it must have been a worse woman than Martha Bemis who could not have pitied him. For that one moment the thought of herself almost left her.

She kissed him.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," she sobbed.

Brewster took a night train for Boston. To have remained longer in Providence would have been intolerable. He wanted change, activity, rush, anything to keep pace with his seething brain. He even got off at Back Bay station because he was not willing to stay on the train till it reached the terminal. Going to a hotel close by the entrance to the snow-clad Public

Gardens, he went hurriedly in, sat at a desk in the writing-room and scrawled this letter:

"*A. O. White, Esq.,*
 "*Ashtabula, O.*"

"DEAR SIR: I have your letter relative to my inheritance. If you will be so good as to take charge of and hold my property for the present I may perhaps arrange to come on and look after it in the course of a few months.

"Yours truly,

"GILES BREWSTER.

"Address me at Tolldown, Conn."

That night and much of the next day Brewster stayed in Boston. He wanted constant change. By turns he rode in street cars, or walked narrow streets, crowded with alien throngs. As the day wore on, his mood grew calmer. He returned to his hotel and sat in an office chair. A sense of rest called to him that was not of the restless life about him. He closed his eyes and saw the face of a girl. "Ruth," he said, "I'm coming back."

And he knew in his heart that he was glad for all.

CHAPTER XXV

TAKING a train from Boston for Willimantic, Brewster changed for South Tolland direct, and reached there at night fall. In an hour he had plodded through the snow of the country road as far as Benjamin Gilbert's house. A bright light was within. He stepped upon the piazza, and knocked at the door. It was opened, and Benjamin Gilbert looked into his face, for a moment holding on high a lantern which he carried in his left hand.

"You've come back," said the big man, in his hearty voice, which betrayed no surprise.

"Yes, I've come back," said Brewster, incisively; "did you expect me?"

"I did. I didn't know but you'd be in town yesterday. I judge you haven't had supper. I'm goin' to have mine. I want you to have yours with me, here and now."

Not a dozen more words were exchanged between the men until they sat at table.

Then Benjamin Gilbert's kind eyes looked from beneath his shaggy eyebrows straight into Brewster's face. "My boy," he said, "you've found out how much that estate is valued at?"

"Yes, I've found out," said Brewster; "there was a mistake on my part of forty-nine thousand, five hundred dollars. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Brewster," said Benjamin Gilbert, "I'm an older man than you air. I don't expect I always know what it's best to do. When I don't, I wait till I do know before I do it. I was more hurt when I see your mistake, and the way your heart was set on it, than maybe you'd realize if I should try to tell you. Now then, what I want to say is this: not knowin' what was best to do, and waitin' till I should know, the thought came to me like a flash that Martha Bemis was the person in this world who'd ought to see that mistake, and set you right, and give you the consolation of her sympathy. Sometimes a man needs sympathy. He don't want

words. He don't want much declaimin' about it. He just wants a woman to tell him that it's all right, and she loves him anyhow. Brewster, it wa'n't in any manner whatsoever indicated to me by sign nor brain that I'd ought to meddle in this thing. I failed to meddle. I guess it was best so. I hope you'll excuse me for believin' I was correct."

"Does Ruth Huntington know?" asked Brewster quickly.

"I have stated the case to her this day; she was down here, and I had deliberated, and concluded that it was proper she should know facts as they air. If I could have so ordained I should have kept you from tellin' her anything about it. But I knew you'd do that anyway, so I let you."

The young man had eaten a slice of bread and drunk a cup of hot tea. He pushed back his chair and lighted a cigar. Then he spoke.

"I have been through a lot since I left Toll-town—a lot. It has been the hardest experience I ever went through in my life. I didn't

think to show Martha the letter till the next day after I'd got there and told her, and when the poor girl saw the mistake the disappointment was fearful."

Benjamin Gilbert looked at him searchingly. "My boy," he said—he stopped speaking and lighted his pipe—"my boy, I more'n half suspected you'd come back to Tolltown not so much sadder as you would be wiser, when it was discovered that you didn't have any fifty thousand dollars. Of course a man couldn't marry a woman on five hundred dollars. With only five hundred dollars the woman wouldn't be near so willin', marryin', bein', as it is, so lastin'."

As he ceased speaking, Benjamin Gilbert looked at Brewster steadily and keenly. But the professor was unaware of more than a casual glance.

They talked for a few minutes longer, and Brewster rose. "I want to see Ruth Huntington to-night," he said. "By all means," said the older man; "by all means." At the door

Benjamin Gilbert gave him his hand. "Brewster," he said, "will you look after my grist mill just the same?"

"Yes."

"Will you excuse me for failin' to tell you about that mistake, which may be I'd ought to have done—but I guess you know I meant right?"

The earnestness in his voice rang so true and deep, and held so much of honest sympathy that Brewster had no longer a doubt.

"I value your friendship beyond words," he answered.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

Benjamin Gilbert stood in the open door till the crunching of Brewster's footsteps had died away up the road. Then he went in, and sat by his fire to think.

There is sweetness and strength and beauty unspeakable in the fine repression of a Puritan woman. When Ruth Huntington gave her

firm hand to Giles Brewster as he stood upon the threshold of her door for the second after she had opened it, the thrill of her very life passed to him. She spoke no word, at first. Then, with a single word, she bade him enter: "Come," she said.

In the depths of her lustrous eyes shone a welcome, a sorrow, a blessing.

He released her hand. She turned, and he followed her to the parlor. "I am sorry for your disappointment," she said simply, when he had taken a chair.

"Yes," he said, "but it was a senseless mistake on my part. I have my friends to thank for their sympathy—" he hesitated awkwardly.

Presently Ruth spoke: "You've seen Benjamin Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"I am glad," she rejoined.

"And I," he said, leaning forward toward her chair, which faced him, "am glad to be in Tolltown where you and Benjamin Gilbert have been kinder to me than anybody, any-

where, ever was in all my life!" She looked earnestly into his face.

"I thought of you when you were gone," she said.

He looked up quickly. "I thought of you," he replied.

She made no answer, unless with her eyes. The look in them quickly became impersonal.

"I shall say good-night," he said, rising; "but you're going to be my neighbor, after all."

"Yes," she answered, "after all." There was a compassion in her gentle voice so sweet and sustaining, that he impulsively took her hand and said: "Whatever comes or goes, your friendship is mine!"

"It is yours," she said.

"For always?"

"Yes."

They had passed to the hallway, and he stood at the door.

"Good-night, my friend!"

"Good-night, Giles Brewster."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE alcoholic career of Richard Spigg was arrested by a woman's smile. Martha Bemis chanced to enter his store when he himself was behind the counter. She purchased. She paid. She smiled. She was no longer as a stranger.

Mr. Spigg attended church. There, she smiled upon him. He accompanied her home. A second Sunday he accompanied her home, this time in the evening. She asked him in. He deferentially suggested that her mother might not be willin' for him to darken her doors.

Martha thought he could safely do so. This was the beginning of the end of the soul-weariness of Richard Spigg. He signed the pledge, became again a member of the family in high and honored standing, and—made ready for his wedding.

Coincident with the evening of the day be-

fore her wedding day, Martha Bemis sought and found in her top bureau drawer the letter she had written to Giles Brewster telling him that she was going to marry Mr. Spigg. She read the letter over, and decided that present circumstances were so like the circumstances under which the letter was originally written that the same letter would do. On second thought, however, she added a postscript.

She was married to Mr. Spigg at high noon next day in her father's parlor. The ceremony being performed, she slipped out of doors and tripped lightly across the street in her wedding dress to mail the letter at the nearest box. She was a pretty sight as she rejoined the wedding guests. Her cheeks were ablaze with color.

Walking rapidly down Tolltown Street, Giles Brewster carried in his hand the letter which Mrs. Richard Spigg had mailed in Providence the day before. It was late in the evening. He had been all day at the grist mill

and had taken supper with Benjamin Gilbert before coming up to the Street. This was the first letter he had had from Martha for several weeks. When he reached his cottage and lighted his big lamp he sat down and opened the missive with no special feeling of pleasure. Her last letter before that had been almost curt.

She had not been thoughtful to write in a large hand, and he had difficulty in accommodating his eyes to read it; but after the first words he would have read though his eyes dropped out:

“DEAR MR. BREWSTER: I have considered carefully of late the matter of our engagement. My parents had objections to its being continued with such unpromising circumstances when we could *not* be married. They appreciated in the highest terms your kind offer to release me which I spoke to them about, and deemed it wise. Of late, also, Mr. Richard Spigg, a gentleman who is a member of our Church, asked me to marry him, and he being a business man and in a position to marry, was

anxious to do so at once, which I have thought best to accept.

“Yours truly,

“MARTHA BEMIS.

“P. S.—Of course the \$500 wouldn't make much difference about our getting married.”

Giles Brewster leaned back in the big old-fashioned rocker and took a mighty breath; then twenty; he rose to his feet, went to the kitchen door almost in a single stride, threw it wide open, and paced from the far corner of the kitchen to the far corner of the dining-room. Some minutes he walked, and uttered not a word. Even to himself there was no word to be said; the relief was too great. A burden was lifted that he had expected might be his to bear for life, with all the grace to which he might grow. The time he had received the letter from the West was as nothing to this! Freedom was his, freedom with honor.

He sank into his chair and drew his overcoat closely about him—the room was fireless—and gave himself to the contemplation of his

suddenly changed life—life that now might mean so much. The joy of love and the joy of life filled his heart at once with a great hope and a great fear.

Every duty he ever had owed to Martha Bemis for a mistaken past was done. Every dear dream that rose in his thought of the future was a dream of Ruth Huntington.

His hands covered his eyes. The fear came upon him, again and again; this night he feared as he never had feared before that he was going blind. He had told nobody how blurred the world had often seemed to him in the month just gone.

He could not have it so. "Oh, my eyes!" he said, "Come back to me!"

So he sat, far into the night; and hoped and feared and dreamed.

"Ruth!" he cried aloud, at last; "Ruth, I want you!"

He was in the dark, alone.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE dinner-table of Benjamin Gilbert next day there was a scene of interest. Brewster had passed across the table a letter, and the letter had been read and contents noted. Benjamin Gilbert looked for the space of an instant upon the not unhappy features opposite him.

“Hey?” he roared.

Brewster’s face bore no mark of affliction. Benjamin Gilbert rose in his might; his huge knee hit the under side of the table a blow that made every dish shiver; he reached across and grasped Brewster’s hand and fairly lifted him to his feet.

“Hey!” he roared, again; “you’re bearin’ it well, my boy, bearin’ it well!”

“So are my friends!” remarked Brewster.

“By the LAND, why shouldn’t they? Does anybody else of your friends know this yet?”

“Not yet.”



“‘Hey!’ he roared”



"Confine it to a few—that's proper—Hey!"

Benjamin Gilbert was shaking hands again.

Both men sat down at the table. Benjamin Gilbert hastily carved a wide slice of rare roast beef, deluged it with brown gravy, feverishly put a high mound of mashed potato on the whole, and passed it to Brewster.

"That woman," said Benjamin Gilbert, as he carved a slice of beef for himself, "was a sunshine patriot and a fair weather soldier—I couldn't help seein' it th' first and only time I ever set eyes on her, an' I've thought it ever since. You'll excuse me for sayin' so now, I presume."

"It's all right, now," said Brewster.

"Why, Brewster, bless me, come to think of it, you was steppin' high, wide and handsome, and actin' like a boy eleven-year-old, when you stopped this mornin' goin' t' th' mill—why didn't you tell me then? I'd a tried to had company to dinner! I s'pose you're willin' for Ruth Huntington to know about this, ain't you?"

"You and she," said Brewster.

"And that's enough," said Benjamin Gilbert.

As they ate dinner Brewster told Benjamin Gilbert in the briefest possible way something of his engagement.

"My impressions air confirmed; I have seen such cases before, though none that galled me quite so much in th' seein'. A young woman with a look and a heft and just such a face as hers, could lean against 'most any man's shoulder, and gaze into his eyes and get him too dizzy to think—and I'm sayin' it with due respect to all parties concerned, which you know before I've said it."

They finished dinner.

"Smoke? Celebrate?" asked Benjamin Gilbert, getting his own pipe.

"Yes." Brewster sat by the stove and lighted his cigar.

Benjamin Gilbert lifted up the broad top and dropped in half a dozen little sticks, and a big "chunk" from the wood box. Taking the letter which still lay on the table, he sat on the

other side of the stove from Brewster, and read it again, having put on his glasses this time, out of respect to the importance of the document.

"Who," he inquired, looking up, and over the top of his glasses with his keen old eyes, "is Richard Spigg?"

"I never heard of him," said Brewster.

"Well," said Benjamin Gilbert, "he's ben a good friend to you, and I hope you won't be ungrateful."

Brewster smiled. "All joy be his," he said. "And hers," he added, more soberly.

"Joy be theirs!" responded Benjamin Gilbert; "and sweetness and gladness to come for everybody that deserves happiness!"

Benjamin Gilbert resumed his scrutiny of the letter. "'P. S.'" he quoted, reading the postscript aloud, "'Of course the \$500 wouldn't make much difference about our getting married.'" The big man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that was worldly. "Brewster, my boy," he roared, "that's exactly what your old friend Benjamin Gilbert

thought when he let you go to Providence without settin' you right on the fifty thousand dollars! Five hundred wa'n't enough!"

The Professor smiled.

That evening Brewster kindled a quick blaze in his dining-room stove, and got a hasty supper. Without having washed dishes, he went over to Ruth Huntington's. Ruth answered his ring, and greeted him at the door. She took him into the front parlor. No one else was there.

"I called a minute this morning," he began, "but you weren't in——"

"At the post-office, I think; I went up at eight."

"Last night," he began again, "I went to the post-office; I got a letter, an important letter, to me." He paused. He had not taken a chair, and she, too, remained standing; his manner gave her a sensation of expectancy.

"This letter," he resumed, "was from Miss Martha Bemis, and it broke my engagement

to be married to her. She is going to marry some one else."

His voice sank, and was low as he spoke the last words; his heart was beating hard; anxiety to discern how Ruth would receive his news possessed him. Anxiety was expressed on his countenance. She looked at him, and drew a deep breath, slightly swaying as she stood.

"Are you—are you *sorry*?" She was half conscious that the word was inadequate for any possible state of feeling on Brewster's part; yet it was the only word she could have uttered.

"I am not sorry," he said firmly; "I am relieved."

"Then I am glad," she said faintly. Her heart was beating furiously; she would have wished above all considerations else not to have wounded him.

"I—my engagement was made at a time before—" he stopped a second abruptly; then resumed, "my engagement was all a mistake, but——"

In spite of herself, she interrupted, and went

on with other words than had been on his lips.

"But you expected to bear the consequences of the mistake. There will be none to bear. I am glad! I am happy for you!" With perfect self possession she gave him her hand.

He took it, and held it.

"I'm happy for you, Giles Brewster!"

"My dear friend!" he answered. If he could only have seen clearly into her eyes!

Their hands unclasped. She turned away from him, and sat at the piano. He took a chair. She played from *Tales of Hoffmann*. Under her fingers every exquisite note seemed a plaintive word; the words were a song—the song inexpressible, like herself and her soul.

She finished, and no longer touched the keys.

"Thank you for playing that," he said; "it was beautiful. Now, I must go."

"It isn't late," she said.

He had risen to his feet. The love of her so filled his heart that he could hardly have suffered himself to remain.

"I have to get up early, to-morrow morning," he said, by way of excuse, and passed into the hall. She followed him, and once more gave him her hand as they said good-night.

When he had gone she came again into the room, and for a few moments, with her hands clasping her scarlet cheeks, stood and rested her elbows on the high back of the great chair his shoulders had just left.

Weeks fled by. For Giles Brewster it was a season filled with a sweeter and a fuller comradeship than Ruth Huntington ever before had given him. They were much together. It was a time of daily joy and hope, and a fear, that grew even as his love grew. He knew not if he might have spoken; might have declared his love. For he did not know if he had the right; he did not know his fate. Was his world some day to be quite dark?

There were nights when a sense of loneliness swept through his soul that wrung him. So many, many nights his last consciousness was

of Ruth. Her spirit sought his, in these nights that were heavy. If it had not been so he could not have endured. Perhaps he did not know how near her gentle soul came to him; how the very breath of her prayers crossed the still, star-dim air that lay between them, as they longed and loved. And the woman's suffering was the greater, as it has been since the world began.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BENJAMIN GILBERT was ailing the first part of April. A bad cold developed into an illness that kept him in bed for some days. Brewster and Ruth took such good care of him that he grumbled at the extent thereof; though truth to tell he needed it, for he had not the recuperative power of youth.

Brewster and Ruth were together more than ever. Brewster looked after the grist mill daily, and after its owner at night, often not sleeping at his cottage. Ruth frequently came down in the morning to prepare a breakfast for Brewster and the invalid, though both objected. Through the day she was there whenever she could be of use, sometimes bringing Jane with her for extra service.

Ruth and Brewster had long evenings together, when they sat in the wide dining-room away from Benjamin Gilbert's room across the hallway, but with doors open so that he could

call if he wished. The dull glow of the evening fire showed faint through the half open draft of the stove; a lamp burned dimly in a recess in the hallway. They sat with curtains raised high. Brewster's chair was by a broad, low window, where he could look out into the night. It rested his eyes when there were only stars to see; or perhaps a wan moon with its crescent white, that sailed into the vaulted space in lingering, dying glory. He was silent for long at a time; yet glad in the consciousness of the sweet presence near him. She, too, was silent; often strangely so, he thought. If he could only have told her what his heart cried out for! Every evening that they passed together was a prayer. But he dared not believe that its answer could come to him.

When she had said good-night to Benjamin Gilbert, and Brewster left him for a little while, and took Ruth home, the gratitude of love unspeakable rose within him that she had given so much of her goodness to him; and he was more silent than ever, as they walked beneath

the night sky. He took her arm, for the road was rough.

“Ruth,” said Benjamin Gilbert, as he sat convalescent in his big rocker in the dining-room one afternoon, with blankets wrapped around him, “I don’t feel like makin’ a long story of this, and I shan’t; what I want to say is, this: for three years, in fact, ever since my brother William died, my property has been so fixed that when I go the property is yours. I haven’t kith nor kin, nor such a friend in the world as you’ve been to me ever since you was woman grown. Now—just let me get this off my mind—” he was coughing, and she had asked him to save himself—“the little house we’re in will be yours, and seventy-six acres o’ clean land; and my Water Company stock; and there’s the grist mill property——”

“Oh, it’s yours, yours for long to come! I don’t like to hear you talk of it being mine. I can’t say how I feel at all that you should want ever to give me all this——”

"Well, well, it's all settled that I shan't leave it to Mis' Henry Bishop, nor yet to th' heathen." The old man brought his hand down upon his knee with some emphasis. "I was speakin' about the grist mill. S'pose I fix that grist mill property to leave it to Giles Brewster—what think?" Benjamin Gilbert watched her.

"I wish you would! Oh, I'd rather you'd do that than anything I could think of!"

Her face was aglow. In a few seconds she spoke again.

"I wish something else. I wish you'd arrange for the Water Company stock to be his some day, if the time comes to you before it does to him that——"

"That there's no need of dividends." The old man's voice faltered; "Ruth, your father was proud of you, and so am I." She suddenly came to him and knelt, and her head was on his knee. There he clasped it.

Brewster had sprained his ankle badly. It

had happened at the grist mill, stepping down from a platform built for bags of grain. He had so miscalculated distance as to turn his ankle half over. He had gotten home to his cottage, after which the ankle had kept him captive for three days. This was the fourth.

"How's he doin'?" asked Benjamin Gilbert of Ruth, who had carried a message from Brewster to Jeb Simmons at the mill, and was stopping, on her way back.

"He's not so lame to-day; he says he'll be out by to-morrow."

"How air his eyes?"

Ruth hesitated. "I'm afraid they are bad," she said at last; "he doesn't talk about them much—I think he doesn't want any one to know how bad they are. But he's going to the oculist again—going in a very few days—I've made him promise positively."

"He promised, did he?"

"Yes."

"Because you asked him?"

"Yes."

Benjamin Gilbert was silent. He stepped to his old-fashioned secretary, sat down comfortably, spread his big arms and at considerable pains wrote a note. "I don't s'pose he better try to read this, and probably you'd have to read it for him; it's instructions—is that written correct? Is that all right, Ruth?" He had handed her the paper. Her face flushed and paled.

"Yes," she said.

"An' you'd be willin' to read it to him?"

"Yes."

He kissed her forehead, and she went away.

She found Brewster in the big rocker in the dining-room of his cottage. His face brightened when she came in.

"I have a note for you." She gave it to him, and stood beside him, waiting.

"From Benjamin Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"Come to think of it, I should hardly have expected Jeb Simmons to compose notes." He smiled, and unfolded it.



“He buried his face in her wonderful hair.”



"I'll ask you to read that for me, Ruth," he said; "the light seems poor this afternoon."

She took it. Her hand trembled; but not her voice.

"Dear Brewster, I've seen how it is with you, and I know how it is with Ruth. She loves you well enough to marry you no matter how bad your eyes are. It ain't a question of eyes."

"Ruth! Is that true?"

"Yes," she said.

His arms found her. . . . After a little, she kissed his eyes. He buried his face in her wonderful hair; it fell, and covered them both.

CHAPTER XXIX

BENJAMIN GILBERT's mare, sleek and willing, was carrying him swiftly over the road from Mixville to Tolltown at the close of a day in May. The sun, going down over Wilton Mountain, shot its last rays upward into a sky of scarlet, crimson and gold. Emerald fields lay in verdant beauty. Boulder River, still as a mirror, reflected the glow of the skies. The soft coloring was fair as a dream. The blue of the horizon at the North grew mystic; the faintest promise of purple twilight tinged the atmosphere. The scent of May blossoms filled the air. Now the river glowed more softly. The waters rippled with a gentle breeze from the hills; then were still again. The color was lessening; sunset skies were paler gold, the crimson and scarlet were fading, fading.

"Lord, ain't it handsome! Ain't it handsome!" said Benjamin Gilbert. "Ain't *everything* handsome!" The kindly old eyes were

alight with a serene joy. A tender smile played upon the face. Complete satisfaction was in the set of the massive shoulders. He gathered the reins in one strong hand, and the other reposed on his knee. On he rode. A wan dusk began to creep into the skies, and brought them nearer to earth. The deepening atmosphere grew weird.

Over the last chain of hills and into Tolltown Street rode Benjamin Gilbert. Easily down the highway beneath the arching trees sped the homeward mare. At the Huntington house the big man drew up; he jumped from the buggy, and went with a stride like that of a lover to the front door.

Ruth answered his ring; the radiance from the swinging lamp in the hallway shone upon her; she met his look with an answering smile.

"Ruth!" he said, "I've got something to tell you—had to tell it right away!"

Again the girl's face lighted. "What is it?"

"Well, when I was in Hartford to-day I

went to see that eye man of Brewster's—what do you s'pose he says?"

"What?" she asked breathlessly.

Benjamin Gilbert's voice rose in a note of triumph. "Why, Ruth, he says Brewster's eyes air so much better that there ain't scarcely a doubt that they'll be as good as ever in a few months more! Says he didn't dare tell Brewster so last time he was in, for fear he'd go right to usin' 'em! Says he's just doin' his level best holdin' him off 'cause he's too ambitious! Says just keep him steady now, an' the chances air all lookin' for a complete recovery! *Complete recovery*—that's what he said! Ruth, ain't it beautiful!"

"It's Heaven!" she cried.



